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# ENGLISH POETRY

*and  
its contribution to the knowledge  
of a creative principle*

*by*  
LEONE VIVANTE

*with a preface by*  
T S ELIOT

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To E V.

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## PREFACE

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I have always remembered a distinction drawn by R. G. Collingwood at the beginning of *The Principles of Art*. He contrasts two types of theorist in the field of aesthetics: the 'philosopher-aesthetician' and the 'artist-aesthetician', and draws attention to the different types of error to which they are exposed. If I advert here to these two kinds of theorist, it is because Signor Vivante seems to me to escape the mistakes of both, and because the distinction may help me to elucidate his particular merit.

The philosopher-aesthetician is frequently a philosopher who has thought it necessary, in order to complete his philosophical system, to produce a volume on aesthetics. The reason why he often fails to impress us, is because his theory appears to have no relation to our own appreciation of the arts, because he fails to deepen our understanding of those works of art which we do admire, to correct our taste when we like the wrong things, or like the right things in the wrong way, and to open our minds to the enjoyment of other works of art to which we have been insensitive. Furthermore, his illustrations from the several arts are sometimes suspiciously familiar. Shakespeare, Goethe and Dante in poetry, Michaelangelo and Leonardo in the visual arts (architecture is less often appealed to), Bach and Beethoven in music, they have all been called upon to dignify a dubious theory. We sometimes even wonder whether the philosopher had ever read poetry, or looked at paintings or listened to music with an innocent eye and ear, and surrendered himself to enjoyment, before he started to construct his aesthetics. We may mistrust any theory of art which takes no account of the art of various societies, however remote, and of the art of different ages, including our own period. And we may wonder whether a wider knowledge, and a finer sensibility, might not have compelled some modification of the theory.

## PREFACE

The 'artist-aesthetician', on the other hand, may rely too much upon his sensibility to compensate for his ignorance of philosophy, and, upon a solid foundation of experience, he may erect a very flimsy theory. He starts from those works of art which he admires, and tries to elaborate a theory which will show what all these works have in common—why, in short, it is right to like these and wrong to like those which do not interest him. He may want to justify his enthusiasm for early Chinese pottery, the wood carvings of the Solomon Islands, and the produce of the studios of his friends. If he himself practises some art, he will be strongly moved to direct other artists to practise, and the public to applaud, those styles that he thinks right for his own time and the immediate future. He had better be candid about this: for it is a necessary and laudable task. He should not be ashamed of exalting neglected artists of the past or of other languages and civilizations, even above their merit, in order to call attention to their value, if he is convinced that these are the most profitable subjects of study, and the best possible influences upon his own contemporaries and juniors. Nor should he be afraid of mocking established reputations for similar reasons. He is only astray, when he attempts to identify what is best for his own time with what is best universally and always, when, in other words, he pretends to erect a theory good for all time upon his perception of what is needed for the present.

If the 'artist-aesthetician' is not himself an artist, but rather a critic and connoisseur, he is still more in danger of confounding the criteria for a particular fashion, with criteria for all times and places. Now fashion is not to be despised. We are all, and I think rightly, responsive to it. Every age must have its own tastes, and it may find, in reviewing the art of the past, that the styles which it finds most sympathetic, most closely akin to the style the age needs for its own expression, are not those to which the previous generation most warmly responded. But the critic who confuses the roles of advocate and judge, in his championship of a particular type of art, can be as narrow a dogmatist as the philosopher-aesthetician who pretends to reveal the meaning of art without having had the aesthetic experience.

Signor Vivante is, as his other works attest, primarily a philo-

## PREFACE

sopher But a study of the several chapters of this book will show that he has not mustered his poets merely to testify on his behalf, but that his knowledge and love of poetry, and of English poetry especially, have antedated and provoked the theory And in return, his theory itself, if accepted, must affect deeply our reading not only of the poets examined but others In the first place, his choice of poets is not itself a literary valuation He has simply, and wisely, made use of those whom he knows best A different selection of poets might have served his turn equally well, but it is probably good for the reader to find, among these poets, some whom he had always regarded as second-rate He may be surprised to find Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Wilde and Longfellow (though I myself consider Longfellow underrated) If I find the first two of these three poets inferior, it is on grounds of literary criticism (as well as because of personal taste), which have nothing to do with Signor Vivante's thesis What matters here, is whether they do or do not, whatever their shortcomings, provide evidence, and what matters most is that Signor Vivante read and enjoyed the work of all these poets for its own sake, that he has not studied poetry in order to provide evidence for a thesis, but that the thesis issues out of his reading of the poets whose work he has enjoyed

While this is a philosophical work, and not a mere series of studies in poetry, the aptness of the illustrations implies that the theory throws light on the work of the poets who are called into the witness-box for it So while the more philosophically-minded reader will read the book in the order in which it is presented, and endeavour to grasp the leading ideas before examining the evidence, the reader whose primary interest is in poetry can begin with the chapters on the poets, or even with the chapters dealing with those poets whose work he knows best he will, I think, be impelled to turn to the chapters in which the author's thesis and conclusions are stated Whether he does or not, he will have been shown, in a new light, the poetry of poets whom he thought he already understood

There are at least two important conclusions, of value for our appreciation of poetry, to which I wish to call attention The first is the establishment of a distinction between what we may

## PREFACE

call 'poetic thought' and 'the thought of the poet' In the short but densely packed chapter on Coleridge, Signor Vivante distinguishes between that poet's 'poetical insight into self-activity' and his more systematic thought (and on the next page, page 123, throws out a most interesting suggestion, in relation to the Italian quattrocento, about the way in which a current of living philosophical thought may be of use to the poet) He is not, of course, in this chapter, concerned with Coleridge's philosophical prose, but he observes significantly

'But, as regards Coleridge's own poetry, we may sometimes doubt, while perusing it, whether it found a help and not a drawback in the fact that perhaps the main centre of his philosophical interest was outside his poems'

And at the beginning of the next paragraph

'It might even be jocosely said of Coleridge, that his poetry, aware of the dangers of a divided interest, tried to find an escape from philosophy in—magic'

And the few quotations which Signor Vivante gives from Coleridge's poems are none of them from the three more 'magical' poems most often read But it is in the essay on Shelley—an essay which has brought me to a new and more sympathetic appreciation of that poet—that the distinction appears most clearly Signor Vivante finds Shelley's poetic thought, not in the political and social views inspiring 'Prometheus Unbound' (or the Notes to 'Queen Mab'), or in the literary history of the 'philosophy of love' to be found in 'Epipsychidion', but in recurrent insights which turn up again and again in Shelley's poetry These insights are what may be called the proper thinking of Shelley's poetry

The distinction which Signor Vivante establishes ought, I think, to deter thoughtful readers from inquiring of a poet (if living) what he *meant* by any particular poem Those who ask the question assume that a poem is a poetical dressing up, or disguise, of something which can be put equivalently in simple straightforward terms, and, if the poet cannot put it in other terms—the terms in which a student to be examined on a poem thinks that he can satisfy his examiners—conclude, either that it is of the nature of poetry to be 'meaningless', or else that the meaning is to

## PREFACE

be found by probing into the unconscious mind, or the concealed biography of the author

Signor Vivante disposes of the error of supposing that a poem can be explained by the author, and the error of supposing that a poem has no meaning, and he also contradicts the assumption that all poetry can be explained by investigation of the unconscious. Still more important, I think, than his distinction between poetic thought and the poet's thinking about or around his poetic thought, is his affirmation—I believe of capital importance—that there is in poetry a genuine creative activity. That something comes into being which is new—in the sense that it cannot be explained by literary or other influences, or by infantile experience that the poet has chosen to forget, or by racial memories and myths of which he is unaware.

'But Shakespeare's works have, in this respect, the merit of being the strongest bulwark against modern psychology. So long as Shakespeare continues to have influence on the English language, it will be difficult for English-speaking people to forget the soul for the complexes, the instincts, the subconscious, the unconscious, or the tropisms. Indeed, the same well-deserving quality, or influence, can be ascribed to all poetry. But as regards Shakespeare, it is in a particularly high degree that the non-composite principle of subjectivity shows, as it were, under our very eyes, its *absolutely inherent* richness and depth.'

I ought also to call attention to Signor Vivante's speculations on the nature of 'sensation' and on the isolation of sensation from thought (in which he joins issue with Collingwood). But I have wished to limit my prefatory presentation to what readers may be prepared to accept from a literary critic who is neither philosopher nor psychologist, and I have said enough, I think, to give the assurance that this book is one which deserves the close study of both philosophers and students of poetry.

T S ELIOT



# CONTENTS

PREFACE BY T S ELIOT	<i>page</i> vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xv
INTRODUCTION	i
I. SHAKESPEARE	5
II MILTON	61
III THOMAS GRAY	76
IV WILLIAM COLLINS	83
V. BLAKE	86
VI. WORDSWORTH	98
VII. COLERIDGE	122
VIII SHELLEY	127
IX KEATS	182
X ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING	205
XI LONGFELLOW	218
XII TENNYSON	232
XIII EMILY BRONTE	245
XIV MEREDITH	248
XV SWINBURNE	262
XVI OSCAR WILDE	307
XVII FRANCIS THOMPSON	313
XVIII SOME CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS	322
INDEX	336





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## INTRODUCTION

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The consciousness of a principle of inward light—an original, self-active principle, which characterizes life and spontaneity as contrasted with mechanism—has found in English poetry one of its richest and highest expressions. The concept of an *active* principle, not entirely derivable from its conditions, has been, under different names, the main object of philosophical studies for over two thousand years, yet this concept of self-activity reveals and develops itself in poetry in a supremely genuine and direct way, which is deserving of consideration.

Before examining, however, the single poems and words in which the active principle is implied, and elicited, and deepened in its intrinsic character, and before showing how there is in the poems themselves, in this respect, a claim to ultimate truth which is, as I maintain, justified, and which is essential to their poetical value, I must ask the reader who disclaims the name of philosopher for a little patience, for I must point out some fundamental conceptions which form the basis of this research.

At first sight, the materialistic point of view seems correct, only those things are real of which the anatomy can be drawn.

But if we look closer, we find that there is a reality which cannot be identified with its objective and in some respects endlessly divisible aspect of existence. The *transparency* or *unity* of a moment of comprehension, for instance, cannot, without our losing it altogether, be traced to its conditions, either ideal or material, which call for further analysis, at the same time it cannot be explained away as an illusion. I will summarize a few arguments which support this view.

(1) Any sensation—any moment of sentiency whatever—constitutes a unity which cannot be seized point by point.

This *unity*, moreover, cannot be explained by reference to the small, even infinitesimal size of the stimulus-field, it cannot be attributed to the narrowing of the many stimuli in one point. In fact it seems that this point ought always to be subject to our

## INTRODUCTION

claim for divisibility and that it could be a point only relatively, and, at any rate, we do not see in it any reason for psychic unity

(2) What exists in a determinate objective way cannot account for the unity of an act of thought. Objectively existent elements, be they mental presentments *objectively* conceived, or external material objects, could contact, pull and push each other, but could never constitute the inner *transparency*<sup>1</sup> of any moment of consciousness or sentiency. The harmonious development of a thought and its constant, ever-renewed unity can be explained or made intelligible only through the conception of an actual cause, which does not work either from the past, or from the outside: a present value of actualization, intelligibly one and manifold, containing a principle of interpretation of our whole psyche, implying, for instance, a value of novelty, and uniqueness, and individuality, and the deep sense of its intrinsic necessity, and developing its logical richness from within.

(3) The whole world of the existents—determined, objective existents, whether ideal or material, whether immobile or in actual motion—cannot present us with anything self-active, but only with repercussions in the links of a chain. For what exists objectively does not require to be called into being, and what does not exist, cannot act: thus effort, in a world of mere objective existents, would be a sheer absurdity.

(4) The fact may be recalled that, even as regards the physical sciences, the scheme of objective multiplicity, or of external conditionality, has lost its exhaustive significance.

(5) Yet the previous arguments are almost purely negative, they point out the insufficiency of the objectively determined aspect of reality to account for mental phenomena. They show that it cannot be considered as the supreme ontological test. But we have also a direct knowledge of a reality which we may call 'in-objective', a reality which is always ahead of its form *qua* formed, and the essence of which is to escape its very self in so far as it is objectively identified. The indeterminate and *potential*

<sup>1</sup> I sometimes use the word 'transparency', in preference to 'unity', in order to convey that the very principle of mental *unity* (as I maintain) must be understood as a sensible reality, that is, a reality of experience, or empirical, and not as a principle of synthesis only abstractly—however necessarily—inferred.

## INTRODUCTION

(positively, powerfully potential) character of activity is indeed immediately felt and known. It accounts immediately and intelligibly for the *many-in-one* and for the present infinity which characterizes mental life. It is not the abstractly inferred, still less the non-phenomenal or super-phenomenal *condition* of the synthesis of thought, it creates, it is this synthesis. We know it, for instance, in any act whatever which we conceive and feel as, in given circumstances, endlessly possible, in the actual infinity of freedom, in the simplicity of a thought.

Our psyche is, in the first place, a unity of qualities intimately, *logically*, related. This unity and these kinships are neither a fiction nor a provisional statement, they are grounded in the intrinsic nature of an original causal principle. And when poets speak of qualities and values as *real* (not provisionally, or merely pragmatically, but ultimately real), they are deceiving neither themselves nor others. They are disclosing, as I intend to show in these pages, the spiritual essence I have just mentioned. The strength of their words lies above all in a deepening realization of the spirit. I maintain that all literary value is also a philosophical achievement, that there is no trace of beauty which is not a reflection—and a discovery—of the intrinsic nature of inner being.

At the same time I hope to render more explicit and, as it were, to refine, in and through the study of its poetical expressions, this concept of an original causal principle, and to lay bare its problems and difficulties.

I have chosen for my study the poets whom I have constantly or more frequently read. My choice does not claim to be a judgement of their value, nor of that of the poets whom I have not mentioned. I leave my notes in a form which is in some respects analogous to that of a philosophical diary. This use of independent annotations presents some advantages not only for the writer, but perhaps also for the ends of the research itself, especially in so far as it allows for the reiterated expression—a repetition, but also, in this matter, a kind of test—of the same truth (or what is intended to be such) in connection with slightly different problems.



## Chapter 1

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

1564-1616

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THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, edited by  
W J Craig *At the Clarendon Press, Oxford*

1 Joy and sorrow, in Shakespeare's poetry, are not pleasant or unpleasant things to be either sought or avoided they are active principles, full of inward purposiveness

Let us consider first the original joy, self-active and primal

O Helicanus' strike me, honour'd sir,  
Give me a gash, put me to present pain,  
Lest this great sea of joys rushing upon me  
O'erbear the shores of my mortality,  
And drown me with their sweetness

*Pericles*, V, 1, 192

Joy is signified as real at its face-value It is felt and expressed as a motive-value which, in its deep intrinsic character, eclipses the particular self Self, and form, are overcome and almost destroyed by this power of joy, so much so that, since *form* is indispensable to and co-essential with being, we are in danger of falling into absolute nothingness and death

The same joy, overcoming in a high degree external objectivity and multiplicity, and finding in a kind of nothingness ('a wild of nothing') its supreme strength, is expressed in the following lines

And there is such confusion in my powers,  
Where every something, being blent together,



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Turns to a wild of nothing, save of joy,  
Express'd or not express'd

*The Merchant of Venice*, III, II, 178, 182

We find here also, both the obliteration of the self and the tendency to overcome form itself—any item of external objectivity implied in it, and any form whatever. In fact, objective multiplicity, and expression itself, may in many ways be at war with the original freedom of joy and its inherent actual infinity.

Joy, real in itself, self-sustaining, self-imposing, a daring novelty of life, and, by very reason of its live originality, felt as a self-transcending principle, is expressed, with a different shade of meaning, in the following lines

Never did captive with a freer heart  
Cast off his chains of bondage and embrace  
His golden uncontroll'd enfranchisement,  
More than my dancing soul doth celebrate  
This feast of battle with mine adversary

*King Richard the Second*, I, III, 88

Joy is both a value of self-realization and a value of infinity. By 'self-realization' I do not mean the assertion of the particular self, I mean *realization*—or, in other words, 'actualization', 'materialization'—as an original value and power, as something which is not the mere result of its antecedents and its conditions. The infinity inherent in it is already intelligible and logically implied in the feeling of the non-predeterminedness of this value and power, that is to say, in its immediately *potential* character, in its freedom. But a deeper infinity lies in what we may further describe as the intrinsic character of this motive-value of self-realization: namely, in so far as it is felt *as a principle*, whose realization, just because of the inwardness or the non-derivative character of its cause, is felt as capable of infinite new and yet kindred realizations, as presumably universal and eternal. This deeper infinity is generally known and felt as a *value of universality*. But when there is something more intensely creative in the unity and simplicity of the act of thought, then the concept of creativity and time, and that of an endless, never complete, transcendence of temporal mul-

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

tiplicity, are in a higher degree implied, and we may rather speak—as language itself suggests—and we speak rightly, of a *value of eternity*, and also of a moment of glory

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes  
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,  
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
Haply I think on thee,—and then my state,  
Like to the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate,

### Sonnet XXIX

This light is at one and the same time joy, and love, and song, and height, it is all these things at once as in Shelley's 'Skylark', or in Dante's 'Paradise' and 'Vita Nuova'. It is *glory*—namely thought realized in its infinite luminous origin. It is born of despondency, of the dissatisfaction which is the measure of a soul's value. Whether the primal cause be actualization itself, or inherent limitless longing for it, is a hard question—so much are the two aspects intimately related and ultimately inseparable.

2 The endeavour to look, not for life, but for the very principle of life, to go deep into the quality as possessing in itself its principle, to seize in it an ultimate substance and power, is witnessed by some expressions, reminding us of others not dissimilar for which English poetry shows a particular liking. Such expressions, I mean, as these 'in my heart of heart' (*Hamlet*, III, ii, 78), 'the soul of love' (*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, II, i, 182), 'joy's soul' (*Troilus and Cressida*, I, ii 311), cf. also, for instance, the verse

To see his daughter, all his life's delight

*Pericles*, IV, iv, 12

where *delight* is identically object and cause, yet it is above all the latter, if they are to be distinguished.

The original and irreducible element is seized in the following lines

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

And thus the *native hue* of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
*Hamlet*, III, 1, 84<sup>1</sup>

3 The moment of *realization*, which we just now called *joy*, is essentially transitory *Form*, expression, actualization, *perfection*, *entelechy*, consciousness-taking-shape—or by whatever name we describe this supremely positive moment in psychic activity—have their value, their original power, their very existence, only in their novelty, *in the making*. Thought must be immediately a power to be, ever-initially infinite in its possibility. It must be a thinking. In so far as it is form *qua* formed it loses its transparency, its unity, its infinity, its claim to absoluteness, i.e. its vital claim to overcoming or discounting its relativity, even by only recognizing it, it is no *thought* at all. This conception finds its clear expression in the words of one of Shakespeare's characters, the poet, the friend of Timon of Athens, who says

our gentle flame  
Provokes itself, and like the current flies  
Each bound it chafes  
my free drift  
Halts not particularly, but moves itself  
In a wide sea of wax no levell'd malice  
Infects one comma in the course I hold,  
But flies an eagle flight, bold and forth on,  
Leaving no tract behind

*Timon of Athens*, I, 1, 23, 46

‘our gentle flame Provokes itself’ These words could be interpreted as an approximate truth, without any merit whatever, almost a truism, referring to a world of mere existents, and meaning or implying that the ‘gentle flame’ firstly exists and then ‘provokes itself’. But more probably these words are suggested, brought forth immediately, by the *poetical* reality itself, here described by the poet, in its deeper and truer character. This is indicated in the lines themselves. The gentle flame ‘flies. Each

<sup>1</sup> In this and in the following quotations, unless otherwise stated, the *italics* are mine

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

bound it chafes' The word 'bound', fitly used to mean 'form'—the form *qua* formed—would hardly be suggested or come upon, were we not ultimately concerned with the original reaction against the *limit* ('bound'), against the objective or objectified reality, the finite and lifeless *particularity*, which perpetually haunts and pursues form itself in its very realization

' Halts not particularly ' The object (i.e., any particular object whatever) is not entirely lacking. But, as the beneficent man cannot do good merely for the sake of charity itself, or for the grace of God, but needs a real love for and faith in the object—a real love for the individual creature he helps, a real faith in the usefulness of his particular act—or else he loses that very grace, in like manner the poet or the artist must believe in the objects which are the subject-matter of his thought, and yet it is not in these objects that the cause, and the value, and the beauty of his work lie. Ultimately, in the poet's or the artist's work, not the particular event, but the perennial and primal character of self-activity, from which it takes its qualities, must be paramount.

' bold and forth on, Leaving no tract behind ' The activity of thought is at the apex of the present, it *makes* the present. It infinitely absorbs the past in its creative novelty. In fact, had we to identify the really active (creative, original) element of activity with something already existent, which, so to say, acts, and which ought to explain this original moment, in the last analysis this could never be found and should be altogether denied.

'No levell'd malice' All extrinsic action of the will, which uses mental presentments as *means*, is incompatible with their intimate logic and power.

' In a wide sea of wax ' As the sculptor impresses shades and lights immediately in the docile clay, as, more exactly, lights and shades impress themselves immediately on the material of expression in like manner artistic or poetical thought must be supposed to find also in the physiological conditions of the brain a highly plastic, ductile material, whose precise form is not pre-existent.

The difference between thinking and *thought* (as past participle), between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, has been, as is well known, one of the most fertile of conceptions throughout the

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

history of philosophy But philosophers, while developing this conception, have stretched and distorted it, in order to apply it to explain, or rather explain away, the problem of matter, and they have at the same time forgotten or even denied it where it is most fruitful, in the study of artistic, logical and ethical activity For instance, *thought*, as a past participle, implies distinction between the thinker and what is thought, between subject and object, while *thinking* does not essentially contain this distinction—not even in its highest expressions, either in art, or in the most creative work of science as well Yet either the inapplicability of this distinction or the overcoming of it has not been admitted in what is misleadingly called the ‘empirical subject’, i.e., in the world of experience The approach of the poet to the problem of the formative nature of psychic reality is, in my opinion, more immediately and purely cognitive and less biased

Shakespeare employs the word ‘performance’ precisely to designate the moment of the *form formed* In the same play the painter, also a friend of Timon, says

Promising is the very air o’ the time, it opens the  
eyes of expectation, performance is ever the duller for  
his act,      performance is a kind of will or testament  
which argues a great sickness in his judgment that makes  
it

*Timon of Athens*, V, 1, 25

The same conception—namely, that intimate creative novelty is essential to value—is briefly expressed in the verse

Things won are done, joy’s soul lies in the doing  
*Troilus and Cressida*, I, 11, 311

4 The motto, ‘Quod me alit me extinguit’ (*Pericles*, II, 11, 33)<sup>1</sup> epitomizes Shakespeare’s view on the essentially new and transient character of original value This motto, ‘That which nourishes or exalts me makes me die, kills me’, with reference to the spiritual essence we are considering, has a manifold meaning

<sup>1</sup> It must be noticed, however, that the scene in which the motto is cited is doubtfully attributed to Shakespeare Cf E K Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, 1930, Vol 1, p 481

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

More precisely, this *extinction* has a threefold sense (1) The death of the particular self. Original value, in its immediate quality of *potency* and in its deeply intrinsic, and primal, character, obliterates the particular self. Not only does it eclipse this self, it pierces deeply into it and destroys it, turning each item of it into a string of its instrument—into a *medium* for the interpretation and expression of itself and of any reality whatever. (2) Not only does the particular subject dissolve itself and become absorbed in the supreme immanent value of activity in the making. Whatever form this original value takes is an obstacle to the realization of its infinite intrinsic character. Value, however, does not exist without form, that is to say, without a beginning, a glimmer, of consciousness. Hence it dies just because of its essential longing for formlessness, because of its freedom, or *potency*. It is not only the particular self that suffers, that very value, in which this self is merged, runs to its destruction. The higher it is, the more it is threatened by formlessness and extinction. (3) Activity may be prone to be dependent as far as possible on its conditions and fixed ends, or relatively immutable, abstractly fixed, blindly idolized objects of the will. But the formative principle which has its cause in its formative value itself, for that very reason, must either renew itself or cease to be, and the light of its origin may be more liable to fail just because of its purity and essential novelty. Therefore—to recapitulate—he who lives *originally* is familiar with the thought of death, because his particular self is felt as but fuel to the original flame, and because he is identified with a value of infinity which essentially strives for formlessness and for extinction, and because, moreover, he must be ever born anew, or else cease to be.

5 The essentially transitory character of actualization, as well as the idea that life holds death in its core, not only in the external aspects of natural processes, but intimately and originally, is very often signified in Shakespeare's poetry. It is pointed out in its comparatively external aspect, for instance in the passages

(*Duke*) For women are as roses, whose fair flower  
Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

(*Viola*) And so they are alas, that they are so,  
To die, even when they to perfection grow!  
*Twelfth Night*, II, iv, 38

When I consider every thing that grows  
Holds in perfection but a little moment,  
*Sonnet XV*

Yet it is generally the immanent value of this moment that Shakespeare emphasizes, when life is exalted by the thought of death, and finds in death itself its crown of perfection and a kind of expression of its self-transcendent character

'Tis strange that death should sing  
*King John*, V, vii, 20

That which sings is our liberation from our particular aims as such, and the feeling of a present infinitude, impersonated in the thought of death, more than that, it is the very annihilation of form and self—this *annihilation* as a positive powerful reality, conditioning and *making* the simplicity of the new moment, highly creative and utterly *one*. The object for which we are striving, or the reason why death is faced or met, is no doubt essential but it would be quite a different thing if it did not constitute, in the unity of the act, almost a means of expression of this felt present eternity

6 The kinship of values just referred to—how the thought of death, and death itself and formlessness as limit-concepts, lie in the very nature of subjective being—is elicited above all, as might be expected, when love constitutes the subject-matter of poetry; though poetical or artistic thought does not differ very much from love in this respect, and poets, when speaking of love, most often interpret the experience of their whole life

The death of the self, something escaping form and existence altogether, to the limit, the revealing and embodying of self-activity as a *principle*, full of intrinsic character or *eternity* these are intimately related values, which blend and express themselves in the following lines

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

death, I fear me,  
Swounding destruction, or some joy too fine,  
Too subtle-potent, tun'd too sharp in sweetness  
For the capacity of my ruder powers

*Troilus and Cressida*, III, II, 21

Cf also in this connection *Venus and Adonis*, 413, 496

The formative principle, which yearns for form, but is extinct with form, may even find, in the simplicity and purity and all-conquering presence of death, both the original indeterminacy and the new form, the Beloved

If I must die,  
I will encounter darkness as a bride,  
And hug it in mine arms

*Measure for Measure*, III, I, 81

7 Self-sacrifice does not represent precisely the essence of love. Love's original value and motive, on the other hand, does not precisely lie in the object—either the beloved person, or that which is done for her or him. The essence of love, its original value and power, lies in the ever-new discovery and realization of the intrinsic or eternal character of self-activity. This feeling of life as a principle, however, though it is the very substance of love, is obviously not its exclusive and distinctive feature, it is known in every value of universality (Cf below, § 18)

Self-sacrifice may be an aspect of love, a way to it, or a consequence of it, or a medium for its expression—a medium which is contributive and, in a certain respect, essential to its reality. And it may consist either in the destruction of the self, a kind of holocaust, or in subordination and service. Every realization either of that self-effacement or of this bond, through wider space and time, promised or carried out, is a stronger means of expression and a stronger realization of love's present eternity. Self-sacrifice may mean the surrender of one's pride. The very hardness and pride of the beloved, on the other hand, who makes herself or himself the centre of the universe, may be an essential element in love's cruel play, constituting, as it were, the 'new



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

form' in which the lover is driven and lost Self-renunciation may involve the surrender even of the most radical, logical and ethical claims of our being Then it is or may be degradation, in strange confusion and contradiction with the value of height which is inseparable from the realization of the primal and self-transcending character of activity Yet whatever form self-sacrifice takes, it obtains its quality from the supreme identification, which is its cause To try to reach love by starting from self-mortification would be a sterile play—if love, or the yearning for love (which is a kind of love) were not there first Now these aspects of love are all expressed by Shakespeare as real and active in their *apparent* quality They are not resolved into particular organizations, such as instincts, or complexes, or the 'as yet unknown' (as it is said) but very promising intricacies of the nervous system They merge in the *humility* which lies at the root of all charity, of all gentleness, of all real strength

The idea, for instance, of 'service' in love is expressed in the following passages

The very instant that I saw you did  
My heart fly to your service,

*The Tempest*, III, 2, 64

I dare not say I take you, but I give  
Me and my service, ever whilst I live,  
Into your guiding power

*All's Well That Ends Well*, II, iii, 109

had [I] force and knowledge  
More than was ever man's, I would not prize them  
Without her love for her employ them all,  
Commend them and condemn them to her service  
Or to their own perdition

*The Winter's Tale*, IV, iii, 387

(*Phebe*) tell this youth what 'tis to love  
(*Silvius*) It is to be all made of sighs and tears,  
It is to be all made of faith and service,  
It is to be all made of fantasy,  
All made of passion, and all made of wishes,

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

All adoration, duty, and observance,  
All humbleness, all patience, and impatience,  
All purity, all trial, all obeisance,

*As You Like It*, V, 11, 90, 96, 101

The essential point that self-denial is more poignant when even the lover's logical and ethical self is affected—and denied—through the absurd, or proud, or cruel will of the beloved (as imaged by the lover himself) is expressed, for instance, in the following lines

Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death,  
I am content, so thou wilt have it so

*Romeo and Juliet*, III, v, 17

Methought a serpent eat my heart away,  
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey

*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, II, 11, 149

Or, more intimately

Nay, if you read this line, remember not  
The hand that writ it, for I love you so,  
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,  
If thinking on me then should make you woe

*Sonnet LXXI*

Such is my love, to thee I so belong,  
That for thy right myself will bear all wrong

*Sonnet LXXXVIII*

Eventually self-denial turns into self-abasement and degradation

Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,  
Neglect me, lose me, only give me leave,  
Unworthy as I am, to follow you

*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, II, 1, 205

8 Self-sacrifice (I said above) cannot be strictly identified with the very essence of love. And the song pierces more directly into and signifies this very essence—namely, a present eternity, born,

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

as I maintain, of the deep experience of the intrinsic character of a self-causing principle, a yearning for an infinite identity through time and space. This in different respects

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,

*Antony and Cleopatra* I, III, 35

The inherent infinite of the sweet luminous sensuous qualities blends with an even more powerful infinite and aptly expresses it (Cf also *Romeo and Juliet*, III, iii, 37)

By all your vows of love, and that great vow  
Which did incorporate and make us one,

*Julius Caesar*, II, 1, 272

And do not seek  
To bear your griefs yourself and leave me out,

*As You Like It*, I, 111, 105

Every difference in carrying on the burden of life, every exclusion from it, as much as any privilege, denies that infinite identification with the other or others which constitutes the very principle of love. And every limit to this endless identity *in the cause* (that is, in and through the intrinsic nature of an original cause) is felt as utterly destructive of love itself.

9 How does this claim for and this value of eternity fit in with the transitory character of love? The creative and essentially transitory novelty in love, as well as in all original value, as it has been already pointed out, is foremost in Shakespeare's thought. For instance, again, in strict connection with love's passion

O spirit of love! how quick and fresh art thou,  
   nought enters there,  
 But falls into abatement and low price,  
 Even in a minute

*Twelfth Night*, I, 1, 9

But fundamentally there is no contradiction. What is deeply felt as original, as *being-in-the-making*, as having in this actuality its cause, is felt as if it should be in all times and places and conditions original, because of something inalienable in this original

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

character itself Yet this *eternity*, of which I am speaking, and which is expressly mentioned in one of the passages just quoted, is not a factual eternity, but only a presumption of it and a claim for it It has in factual eternity or everlastingness a medium of expression On the other hand, it means far more, in a certain respect, than factual eternity Everlastingness in itself does not in the least possess such value

Eternity lies in the very acme of novelty It is an aspect of creativity, of the fact of there being anything that is self-caused Or to say the same thing in different words the intrinsic or eternal, i.e. the *principle*, of freedom lies in freedom itself, in its ever-fresh self-realization, and not vice versa This is the arduous yet far-reaching truth which underlies the apparent contradiction (cf Chapter VIII, § 24)

10 Some other essential aspects of love's passion are the following Not unlike thought's activity in art, it is felt as everywhere original in the objects themselves They are no longer *objects*, they are alive in their quality, calling, singing, joining in one single choir

Sit, Jessica look, how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold  
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
*The Merchant of Venice*, V, 1, 58

It is a value above joy and pain In fact 'joy' and 'pain' and sorrow and happiness generally concern, to a certain extent, the self, which is transcended by love It is the full immanence of value All claims for the useful and the everlasting are not only, are not precisely, forgotten, rather they are overcome and nullified Our very claim for transcendence is, as it seems, most radically appeased, absolved

but come what sorrow can,  
It cannot countervail the exchange of joy  
That one short minute gives me in her sight  
*Romeo and Juliet*, II, vi, 3

Cf also *Cymbeline*, I, 1, 135

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

If it were now to die,  
'Twere now to be most happy, for I fear •  
My soul hath her content so absolute

*Othello*, II, 1, 192

Cf *Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*, I, 1, 35

The original element may be represented not only as defying temporal and spacial multiplicity, but as showing its constancy, as it were, in an inward direction. This character of intimacy of love is reflected in the line

It is my soul that calls upon my name

*Romeo and Juliet*, II, 11, 164

That voice calls from the depth of his being. This is awakened, recognized in its inward truth. It is as if through this recognition, and renewal, the intimate and perennial source of his life were revealed to him.

11 The creative *novelty* which is essential to value—to original value, not to value as conventional or utilitarian, as the abstract object of an externally constructive will—is naturally expressed in and through the image, both externally and inwardly conceived, of *budding*, and that of *morning*, and gives to them their poetical and their ontological significance. They depend on and, on the other hand, witness the reality of this moment of original indeterminacy, of undefiled possibility, of virginity, of comprehension, the creative and supremely potential moment. In fact, were it not for this, the power and frequency of these images in poetry could hardly be understood. Set aside the consideration that the grace of things in their birth and their first purity would not be perceived, if it were not *first* a quality of our mental synthesis which is revealed in and through them.

The irresolute hour of becoming is expressed, for instance, in the lines

O! how this spring of love resembleth  
The uncertain glory of an April day,  
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,  
And by and by a cloud takes all away!

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I, 111, 84

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Here is a beautiful personification of the first hour of day

Modest as morning when she coldly eyes  
The youthful Phoebus

*Troilus and Cressida*, I, iii, 229

'Modesty' and 'coldness', in the shade of meaning in which they here appear, belong to the still undisclosed highly potential moment, to the uncompromised, spotless, silent infinity, or *indeterminacy*—all names for the same actual value of potency, to something initial, and primal, and vast, in the original cause, waiting for form, and yet shrinking from it, still too far, as it were, from form itself to hear its immediate call and to unite with the rich world of matter and show its own power and fecundity. The two above-mentioned qualities, as they are represented in the lines just quoted, constitute, each of them, a discovery in, a deepening of, the intrinsic nature of subjective being. Therefore they are felt as 'universals', or (if I may be allowed this use of the word) as 'infinitives', through which the very principle of life is radically and most widely interpreted and infinitely present, and in which we seem to commune with all nature. They are the heaven of poetry. Yet, in their naked reality, they would lack external objectivity, which is also an essential irrepressible claim of the spirit, inseparable from *form* itself. *Personification* here fills the gap—allows this one-sidedness in the spirit's unity and integrity to disappear. The power and value of the verse, however, lies in the *infinitive*, and the personification is hardly anything more than a delicate means of expression merged in it. Or else, as frequently happens, bereft of this *real* and highly revealing element which justifies it, the personification becomes a rhetorical figure.

Here is another personification of the first hour of day

and jocund day

✓| Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops

*Romeo and Juliet*, III, v, 9

The inward light, in its initial secret richness and infinite promise, gives the light-rays their qualities, no doubt, also in the line

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Lo! in the orient when the gracious light

*Sonnet VII*

The image of the *bud*—the qualities evoked and embodied in it and by it—is almost a constant motive-value in Shakespeare's poetry Let us gather some examples

As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown,

*Much Ado About Nothing*, IV, 1, 58

As is the bud bit with an envious worm,

Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,

*Romeo and Juliet*, I, 1, 156

For canker vice the sweetest buds doth love,

And thou present'st a pure unstained prime

*Sonnet LXX*

My unblown flowers, new-appearing sweets,

*King Richard the Third*, IV, 1v, 10

See also, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I, 1, 42, *King Henry the Eighth*, III, 11, 352-3, *Hamlet*, I, 111, 39, *A Lover's Complaint*, 75  
Compare also the lines

Never so much as in a thought unborn •

Did I offend

*As You Like It*, I, 111, 54

The words 'unborn', 'unblown', 'new-appearing', 'new', 'chaste', 'unstained', 'sweet', and (in the passages referred to only) 'fresh', 'tender', are certainly derived, in part, from our external experiences, but this is rather their *occasional* derivation They have their first and perpetual origin and meaning from the very quality of the mental synthesis, from the mental synthesis in one or the other of its radical aspects or moments—without which things would not have for us any quality whatever, and which these very words both imply and reveal And it is the proper character of poetical thought to vindicate this primal factor in the formation of language

12 If joy, at its face-value, is an ultimately real and *active* quality, so is sorrow, in Shakespeare's lines

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Most subject is the fattest soil to weeds,  
And he .  
Is overspread with them therefore my grief  
Stretches itself beyond the hour of death

*Second Part of King Henry the Fourth*, IV, IV, 54

Sorrow is all-penetrative and all-inclusive it explores and infinitely extends the future, in order to cover it all with shade  
Nothing is left in the soul, except this greedy, exacting infinity

Fear not, 'tis empty of all things but grief,  
*Cymbeline*, III, IV, 71

Sorrow searches closely and minutely into things absent, each of which becomes, through very *absence*, a wider and intenser present reality

If I were mad, I should forget my son,  
Or madly think a babe of clouts were he  
I am not mad too well, too well I feel  
The different plague of each calamity  
*King John*, III, IV, 57

Cf *Id*, I, I, 93

It is made the active subject of the proposition, or of the verse, both grammatically and logically

Our griefs, and not our manners, reason now  
*Id*, IV, III, 29

The present infinity of sorrow—the actively, vitally infinite character of its very quality—is again expressed in the following lines

Why tell you me of moderation?  
The grief is fine, full, perfect, that I taste,  
If I could temporize with my affection,  
*Troilus and Cressida*, IV, IV, 2

My love admits no qualifying dross,  
No more my grief,  
*Id*, I, I, 9

All form becomes discordant with the dumb immensity of sorrow, with its utter emptiness, with its *formlessness*



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

This music mads me let it sound no more,  
For though it have help madmen to their wits,  
In me it seems it will make wise men mad  
Yet blessing on his heart that gives it me!  
For 'tis a sign of love, and love to Richard  
Is a strange brooch in this all-hating world

*King Richard the Second*, V, v, 61

The indefiniteness of the very sensation of weight, and, as I maintain, the actively infinite character inherent in it,<sup>1</sup> concur, with other elements, to make of the sense of weight, and of the words related to it, an apt means of expression of sorrow

'tis all men's office to speak patience  
To those that wring under the load of sorrow,  
*Much Ado About Nothing*, V, 1, 27.

Compare also

Under love's heavy burden do I sink  
*Romeo and Juliet*, I, iv, 22

Yet the moment of extreme indeterminacy and lack and want of form, as it may be known in sorrow, is most forcibly and significantly expressed by the words 'nothing' and 'heavy nothing' as used in the following passages

(*Bushy*) Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,  
Which show like grief itself, but are not so

(*Queen*) It may be so, but yet my inward soul  
Persuades me it is otherwise howe'er it be,  
I cannot but be sad, so heavy sad  
As, though in thinking on no thought I think,  
Makes me with heavy nothing faint and shrink  
*King Richard the Second*, II, ii, 14, 28

Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings,  
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,

<sup>1</sup> Cf Chapter XVIII, 4, 3-5

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakes so my single state of man that function  
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is  
But what is not

*Macbeth*, I, iii, 137

Indeed, a fundamental and inexhaustible truth is here implied and expressed potentiality is more real and stronger than actuality itself This is true, however, in so far as psychic reality is concerned, perhaps also, hypothetically, in so far as physical reality is held to be not entirely exhausted in its objective aspect For in the world of mere objective existence, of mere existents conditionally related, that is rightly defined as 'potential' which in fact does not exist

13 Obviously, by the idea or feeling of 'nothing', I do not mean that sheer nothingness is signified, but the thought of it, nothingness in so far as it is thought or felt In like manner, 'formlessness' must not be understood in an absolute sense, but as a limit-concept In fact, there is no value, for all that we know or can conceive, without a beginning of form And this implies in its turn, as I think, an element of objective existence or external multiplicity And also, when in Shakespeare's words we think of 'violent delights' which 'in their triumph die' (*Romeo and Juliet*, II, vi, 9), what matters is not directly sheer death, but the thought or the foreshadowing of death, 'death' as felt, whether sheer death actually follows or not The same for 'night' what is meant is 'night' as perceived, as qualified by thought or sense

When Shakespeare speaks of crude objective death the language and the images he uses are quite different

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where,  
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot,  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod,

*Measure for Measure*, III, 1, 116

When that this body did contain a spirit,  
A kingdom for it was too small a bound,

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

But now, two paces of the vilest earth  
Is room enough

*First Part of King Henry the Fourth*, V, iv, 89

(*Joan of Arc*) Him that thou magnifiest with all these titles,  
Stinking and fly-blown lies here at our feet

*First Part of King Henry the Sixth*, IV, vii, 75

Yet obviously 'death', 'night', 'nothingness', and 'emptiness', and 'formlessness', when they are made a symbol or a means of expression of the original indeterminacy, become the opposite, in a certain respect, of their objective reality, or unreality

14 This essential moment of the mental synthesis may be identified, in its barest, extreme aspect, with that unsatisfied and infinite, intimate demand, without form or answer, lying deep as life, or, as it were, deeper than life—which is sometimes described as 'tedium'. The idolaters of abstractly fixed objects of the will, and the slaves of utility, and the easily satisfied, hardly know this tediousness. But he who has lost his faith in the objects, yet needs to replace it with a truer faith, his soul secretly longing for a high justification in life's harsh ways, and most purely depends on the light and novelty of the spirit—and especially the poet—is likely to be familiar with this condition. Shakespeare's Muse rarely dwells upon it, but it is this bare primal want and unanswered questioning that is signified in the following lines

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world

*Hamlet*, I, ii, 133

Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale,

*King John*, III, iv, 108

or with another shade of meaning, where the form, or the need for it, is already more alive or less hopeless

how want of love tormenteth

*Venus and Adonis*, 202

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

The feeling of tediousness obviously is not a particular morbid state, as shallow thinking would have it, it reflects an unexpressed intimate demand in which our being and destiny are deeply involved, and it may be the seed of generous deeds and daring actions

What pleasure, sir, find we in life, to lock it  
From action and adventure?

*Cymbeline*, IV, iv, 2

15 Psychic indeterminacy—the moment of the longing for form, of the questioning—acquires a quite different value when it is neither crudely divorced from form, bereft of any answer whatever, nor violated in its boundless virtuality and vital unity. Night, and twilight, and moonlight, suggest and embody the subjective principle in this highly potential character and primal value—non-composite, infinitely possible and real, extending to the remotest boundaries, and profoundly one. The *day*—sharply outlined visible objects—may efface all sense of a present infinity and of a common principle in the qualities of the things perceived or in the things themselves. It may symbolize either the moment of objective multiplicity, or the fullness of form veiling on pride and exclusion and crude forgetfulness. These and other aspects of night, day and twilight, widely significant precisely because of the spiritual foundation into which we are searching, and which they reveal, are represented in the following passages or fragments.

That all the world will be in love with night,  
And pay no worship to the garish sun  
*Romeo and Juliet*, III, ii, 24

The gaudy, blabbing, and remorseful day  
Is crept into the bosom of the sea,  
And now loud-howling wolves arouse the jades  
That drag the tragic melancholy night,  
*Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*, IV, i, 1

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

the night's dead silence  
Will well become such sweet-complaining grievance  
*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, III, II, 85

In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self,

*Sonnet LXXIII*

Compare also

The moon methinks, looks with a watery eye,  
And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,  
Lamenting some enforced chastity  
*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, III, I, 207

16 Words may express present infinity both because of the unlimited character of the quality they denote, and because this quality is also concerned otherwise with radical—and therefore, presumably, universal—aspects of life and nature. It must however be emphasized that they do not owe their poetical-cognitive value and their universality to an *abstract* and *general* character, but to the fact that the quality expressed is felt as belonging in some way to the essence of being, as co-extensive with it, and therefore as widely, infinitely interpretative and comprehensive, and, moreover, to the fact that the main interest lies in the quality in itself and for itself, rather than in the particular objects and aims that are signified through the *medium* of the quality. For instance

O sleep! O gentle sleep!  
Nature's soft nurse,  
*Second Part of King Henry the Fourth*, III, I, 5

Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!  
Macbeth does murder sleep', the innocent sleep,  
Sleep .  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast,  
*Macbeth*, II, II, 36, 40.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

~ | Enjoy the honey-heavy dew of slumber  
*Julius Caesar*, II, 1, 230

Yet 'sleep'—like 'death', and 'night'—still to a certain extent owes its beauty and meaning to an infinitude and purity of which it is made the expression and symbol, apart from that which is supposed to be in itself

Kneeling before this ruin of sweet life,  
*King John*, IV, iii, 65

The image owes in part its depth and wideness to this use of the word 'life', at one and the same time because of its radical significance and because of its original value of indeterminacy and endless possibility 'Life' is not here, as I say, an abstract or merely general concept, the result of an extrinsic selective process, constructed, composite, but a living quality—not weaker, but stronger, just because of its highly indeterminate character Compare also the following lines

John hath seiz'd Arthur, and it cannot be,  
That whiles warm life plays in that infant's veins .  
*Id.*, III, iv, 131

Cf *Measure for Measure*, III, 1, 118, *Julius Caesar*, V, v, 73

The word 'growth' may play almost the same logical rôle as the word 'life'

Infect the sound pine and divert his grain  
Tortive and errant from his course of growth  
*Troilus and Cressida*, I, iii, 8

A value of immanent or intrinsic purposiveness is here expressed in its subjectively radical and nature-wide significance

In the following line, 'prodigality' is another name for life's rich, harmonious, deep spontaneity, and, again, it is not an abstract noun. It is spiritually concrete, and shares with the entire expression in calling us into a value of wide transparency and depth

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Fram'd in the prodigality of nature,

*King Richard the Third*, I, II, 245

The last passages quoted, it is worth while to notice, are characteristically, in a high measure, Shakespearian

Most frequently it is through the comparison of two things that the common *essential* quality is happily elicited and embodied *Sweetness*, for instance, and *freshness*, and *purity*, are called up in their deep-reaching and infinite interpretative power in and through the ever-new comparison between a girl and a flower

Death lies on her like an untimely frost

Upon the sweetest flower of all the field

*Romeo and Juliet*, IV, v, 28

The word 'soul' is often used to render a quality in a high degree self-substantial, self-sustaining, active, and to endue it with a value which is not confined to a particular case, to recognize in it an inalienable, intrinsic character, a reality *ex principio*—as, for instance, in the following line

There is some soul of goodness in things evil

*King Henry the Fifth*, IV, I, 4

17 All these words and modes of expression betray and reveal an urge for depth and universality of meaning. But the word which is in the same respect, so to say, the greatest 'potentializer' in Shakespeare's language is the word 'nature', as may be seen in some of the lines just quoted, and in such expressions as 'Against the use of nature' (*Macbeth*, I, III, 137), 'Turn'd wild in nature' (*Id.*, II, IV, 16), 'Macbeth Shall live the lease of nature' (*Id.*, IV, I, 98), 'diminutives of nature' (*Troilus and Cressida*, V, I, 39), and in many more examples

Shakespeare expounds also in a more explicit way his general idea about nature—which supports and in some way explains so wide a use of the word—in the following passages

Yet nature is made better by no mean

But nature makes that mean

*The Winter's Tale*, IV, III, 89

Cf. also *Id.*, IV, III, 96

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Common mother, thou,  
Whose womb unmeasurable, and infinite breast,  
Teems, and feeds all, whose self-same mettle,  
Whereof thy proud child, arrogant man, is puff'd,  
Engenders the black toad and adder blue,  
'The gilded newt and eyeless venom'd worm,

*Timon of Athens*, IV, iii, 178

Yet what here certainly belongs to direct poetical knowledge, rather than to Shakespeare's reconstructive thought, lies in a value of universality, of extreme detachment from whatever is too strictly human, in one's identification with original causality in its impersonal character

18 Many aspects of dead and living nature may constitute a vehicle for expressing and knowing the powerfully potential, and self-transcendent, and, in a sense, form-transcendent character of subjective being. But when the infinite identity in the *cause*, that is to say, in the very originality and intrinsic character of self-activity, not only transcends the objective particularity of things and of our experiences in general, but overcomes the sharp separation and conflicts between living individuals, then we are concerned not only with comprehension, but with communion, not only with truth, but with charity, and with other moral values, and ethical—rather than logical—'universals' ('*Prevailingly*', I mean, for it is still a matter of proportion, and there is no categorical distinction—a feeling of communion with all creatures lies still in the logical 'universal', e.g., in contemplation, in *truth* itself). Now it is worth noticing that, in Shakespeare's poetical knowledge, *nature* is not so indifferent to good and evil, as might be inferred from the passage last quoted. He sees in nature a core of tenderness, which lies even deeper than pride and cruelty. This is his interpretation of nature, from an ethical point of view.

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,  
*Troilus and Cressida*, III, iii, 175



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Nature here seems to be identified with the *actual cause*, in which all kinships have their focus and their perpetual source

Compare also

make thick my blood,  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious *visitings of nature*  
Shake my fell purpose,

*Macbeth*, I, v, 44

He loves us not,  
He wants the *natural touch*, for the poor wren,  
The most diminutive of birds, will fight—  
Her young ones in her nest—against the owl

*Id.*, IV, ii, 8

If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not,

*Hamlet*, I, v, 81

Cf also *The Winter's Tale*, I, ii, 152, *Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*, II, ii, 18, and the line

No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity  
*King Richard the Third*, I, ii, 71

19 The word 'charity' can be used more aptly with reference to especially human problems but *pity* is the most essential and comprehensive word and concept to describe the realization of life as a *principle* in and through one's contact with other living beings, the lightning-like discovery of a keen identity. It is rooted in sentience itself.

Pity for animals is not infrequently a subject-matter or rather a motive of poetry in Shakespeare's works

As I for praise alone now seek to spill  
The poor deer's blood, that my heart means no ill  
*Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, i, 34

Here, moreover, the *social*, in a sense, is impressively opposed to the *human*, an opposition which lies deep in the very structure of subjective being. Cf. below, § 36

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

And as the butcher takes away the calf,  
And binds the wretch, and beats it when it strays,  
Bearing it to the bloody slaughter-house,  
Even so, remorseless, have they borne him hence,  
And as the dam runs lowing up and down,

*Second Part of King Henry the Sixth, III, 1, 210*

Cf also *As You Like It*, II, 1, 22-68, *Titus Andronicus*, III, 11, 60, *Pericles*, IV, 1, 76 When we describe, through ourselves, creatures very remote from us, so much the more does the feeling of a recognized common quality seem to reach deep into the source of our being. This conveys a thought of vast comprehensiveness and depth, which blends with the ethical aspect of the same urge for an identity *ex principio*.

In *duty* there is a value of self-transcendency which inclines to repress or to ignore even itself, i.e., this very value itself and all feelings, inasmuch as there is in them a lingering whatever in form or value. The particular self acquires a stronger relief than in love and contemplation, while at the same time it is thinned, dematerialized as it were, absorbed in and by the self-transcendent character of the will. This will is no longer identified with value, but sets it up as an extrinsic end. The sharp will makes duty obviously different from other forms of self-renunciation, but substantially it depends on the same principle. Shakespeare is always watchful for such kinships.

God bless thee! and put meekness in thy mind,  
Love, charity, obedience, and true duty

*King Richard the Third, II, 11, 107*

These different terms are not put together in virtue of a number of obscure links, but are intelligibly born of one and the same spiritual essence.<sup>1</sup>

the queen that bore thee,  
Oft'ner upon her knees than on her feet,  
Died every day she liv'd Fare thee well!

*Macbeth, IV, 111, 109*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my *Notes on the Originality of Thought*, § 57

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

This is certainly not the 'living death' (cf *Richard the Third*, I, II, 153) of the lover, yet it reflects the same high logic of love

Such kinships in the original knot of values are also asserted by Shakespeare in a more explicit way

And who can sever love from charity?

*Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, III, 365

Cf *Id*, IV, III, 346, *The Merchant of Venice*, V, I, 79 (quoted below, § 29)

The very law of charity is implied and as it were seized in the following words

I am a man

More sinn'd against than sinning

*King Lear*, III, II, 59

In fact, every favour of fortune breaks the infinite identity with all creatures, which is the foundation of the ethical universal, and all penance and bearing of the cross, and especially the suffered wrong, may restore it

'Pity' (cf 'sacred pity', *As You Like It*, II, VII, 123) is the favourite term to express the ethical universal 'Mercy' is another Cf *The Merchant of Venice*, IV, I, 193, *Measure for Measure*, II, II, 58-63

The logico-ethical essence of reason, a value of spiritual objectivity—quite a different thing from the abstractly objective point of view—a value of infinite and infinitely impersonal identification with reality, and with living beings especially, and with their conflicting interests, is many times signified (cf, for example, *Measure for Measure*, II, II, 64)

The idea is often expressed or implied that real strength does not lie in self-assertion and aggressiveness, much less in ostentation, but in a virtual and yet present value, exceeding one's own particular interest

Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just,

*Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*, III, II, 233

Cf *Richard the Third*, V, II, 17, *Id*, V, III, 241, *King Richard the Second*, II, I, 174-6

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

20 In Shakespeare's plays treason, deceit and error are found at every step. Their particular forms, not their principle, may be considered as relative to a given time and place. Treason, for instance, is a breach of that *unity*, which is another name for activity in its most elementary *potential* character, and which is supremely real. This 'breach' is searchingly described, for instance

And will you rent our ancient love asunder,  
To join with men in scorning your poor friend?  
*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, III, II, 215

The light which lays treason open to view is the reality of spirit. The voice which unmasks it is strong as life and blessed, even in its helplessness.

The Moor's abus'd by some most villanous knave,  
*Othello*, IV, II, 139

The moment in which 'earthly things made even' 'atone together' is explicitly mentioned (cf. *As You Like It*, V, IV, 116).

Good and evil are not for Shakespeare mere relative concepts. I refer, naturally, to his poetical thought and knowledge. For we hardly know his *constructive* or *reconstructive* thought—in which it may be that he was not very much superior to psychologists in general.

His heroes of evil do not convey the impression of the unconscious vulgarity and one-sidedness which we meet in real wickedness. There is something subtle in or about their words which discounts their one-sidedness, while recognizing it as such. Indeed, they assent even too much to the good, while speaking about it in accordance with the general standard of language. When an author is really cynical and lacking some chord in his instrument, he is immediately recognized, and here this is not the case. One-sided or defective is, it seems to me, in *Coriolanus* and in *Julius Caesar*, the contempt for the unlearned multitude—in so far as it should be extended also, at any rate, to the learned and favoured multitude, or, again, the concept of political freedom. But this is readily seen, if I am not mistaken.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

21 Grace is another, perhaps the highest, name for the spirit, in Shakespeare's language as well. This term, both in its classical and in its Christian associations, evokes the simplicity of the original cause, its inherent richness of kindred aspects, none of which can be considered separately without some effort or artifice, its inviolable, ineradicable harmony, its superior wisdom. *Grace* is one with freedom in its fullest display, with its depth, the eternal in it. It lies at the root of life and of its mystery. Bereft of this inward light of grace, life is utterly undone, nothing is left, unless it is 'that idiot, laughter' (cf. *King John*, III, iii, 45). The counterpart of *grace*, in Shakespeare's language, is *deformity*. Never does Shakespeare depict more forcibly the ethical principle, the good, than when he represents it, negatively, through the lack of *grace*.

for, from this instant,  
There's nothing serious in mortality,  
All is but toys, renown and grace is dead,  
*Macbeth*, II, iii, 99

Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more, it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing

*Id.*, V, v, 23

Compare also

Proper deformity seems not in the fiend  
So horrid as in woman

*King Lear*, IV, ii, 60

We may rightly consider woman as, in her outline, less definitely and sharply sculptured and, as it were, solidified than man, as *not* representing or symbolizing the moment of the form *qua* formed, farther from it than man—therefore more readily moved by a spirit of sweet, wide and rich comprehension, nearer to the core of 'tenderness' in nature, in which is contained the secret of

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

nature's primal creativeness This is not the last ontologically significant reason why poets see or expect to see in her the immanent spirit, *grace*, and an embodiment of the eternal principle itself

Though all things foul would wear the blows of grace,  
Yet grace must still look so

*Macbeth*, IV, 111, 22

Neither counterfeit of grace, nor grace employed to disgraceful ends, can affect its original value, its intrinsic, self-substantial quality No crime, no use of evil deeds, is powerful enough to cancel its ultimate genuine reality Its value is not pragmatically grounded

Compare for the use of the term 'grace', *Romeo and Juliet*, II, 111, 27 (quoted below, § 36) Compare also the following passage (John of Lancaster addresses Richard Scroop, the Archbishop of York, who is 'misusing' 'the reverence' of his place, and reminds him how he had been to all of them—to us—the man 'deep' 'within the books of God' )

To us, the speaker in his parliament,  
To us the imagin'd voice of God himself,  
The very opener and intelligencer  
Between the grace the sanctities of heaven  
And our dull workings

*Second Part of King Henry the Fourth*, IV, 11, 18

✓  
22 Individuality may be understood to mean, or to depend upon, different things (1) The *particularity* of the self, its *given* physical and mental organization, and other *given* conditions, with their limitations, weighing on the present, rather than being absorbed by it This is form *qua* formed, properly called 'particularity', not 'individuality' (2) Form—actualization—in the moment of its *exclusiveness*, pride, cruelty (3) But individuality, in its deeper meaning, has its source in the very creativity and spirituality of self-activity Firstly, we may infer it from the very *essential novelty* of the act, its non-predeterminate character, inas-

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

much as it breaks the inert chain of the conditions determining each other according to an indifferent, uniform necessity. But we know this—namely, that individuality and original causality imply each other—more intimately and intelligibly. The overcoming of the limit, and of any limit whatever, *the overcoming of the conditions*, belongs to the very nature of subjective being.<sup>1</sup> It is acutely felt as the source of all value of universality. Yet it is identical with the source of that value of *uniqueness*—of every act of thought, logical, ethical or practical—which constitutes the very essence of individuality. It is the immanent cause of the essentially new, unreachable and incomparable character of the act. In the feeling of our individuality we hate to be compared either to others, or even to ourselves (in any moment whatever of our past or future). Original indeterminacy is untranslatable in objective terms, which alone can be superimposed and exactly compared; it is in some sense ineffable. This principle of individuality and intimacy is reflected in the words of Hamlet, and makes them pregnant with meaning, where he says

you would pluck out the heart of my mystery,  
*Hamlet*, III, 11, 388

Compare also, *Id.*, I, 11, 85, and the line (Hector speaking to Achilles)

But there's more in me than thou understand'st  
*Troilus and Cressida*, IV, v, 239

Responsibility also, and on the same ground, shares in the origin and essence of individuality. And at the same time responsibility and its other aspect, remorse, show once more that the urge for universality and the urge for intimacy and for individuality are vitally one. In the brief subtle moment in which the ever *potential* quality of freedom can exert itself, there the *locus* of the spirit, its reality, lies. The inanimate elements of nature may be employed, by way of contrast, to elicit this reality or the hopeless want of it.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Introduction*

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters

*King Lear*, III, 11, 15.

Shakespeare's characters are sometimes eagerly searching for this subtle moment in which there may be responsibility

How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds  
Makes ill deeds done! Hadst not thou been by,  
A fellow by the hand of nature mark'd,  
Quoted and sign'd to do a deed of shame,

*King John*, IV, 11, 219

Compare also *Id*, 1d, 231, *King Richard the Third*, II, 1, 107

A really strong individuality depends in the highest measure on the independence of one's conscience, on what we may define as its deep *immanent* value. We may in our judgements rely on the judgements of other people, on our conscience as confirmed by 'our outward consciences' (*Henry the Fifth*, IV, 1, 8), or we may need to feel its intrinsic truth reflected or embodied in some symbol, for which we may look in the past, or in the future, or in God. Obviously, one's independence may be made easier through lack of conscience, blind pride, and so on. But when this is not the case, the more one's conscience does not depend on external rules and standards, but on its *inward truth*, the more is individuality emphasized and realized. This inward truth is indeed a value of universality: its essence lies in the immediate feeling of an original, intrinsic or *eternal* character in the nature of inner being, but, at one and the same time, this value of *present* eternity, this full immanence of value in the fleeting moment, *makes* individuality.

I have spirit to do anything that appears not  
foul in the truth of my spirit

*Measure for Measure*, III, 1, 211

Were it not that this concept of inward truth is founded in the intrinsic nature of inner being, these words, I think, and especially such an expression as 'in the truth of my spirit', could never have been either used or formed, in any language whatever.



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

23 Immanence of value is a constant and as it were exultant, triumphing note all through Shakespeare's plays We find value absolutely present, self-dependent, in *pride* itself

I have no brother, I am like no brother,  
And this word 'love', which greybeards call divine,  
Be resident in men like one another  
And not in me I am myself alone

*Thurd Part of King Henry the Sixth*, V, vi, 80

Let the Volsces  
Plough Rome, and harrow Italy, I'll never  
Bc such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand  
As if a man were author of himself  
And knew no other kin

*Coriolanus*, V, iii, 33

Cf also *Id*, II, ii, 132, *Othello*, I, i, 59 An arbitrary, externally constructive will, in other words, abstract freedom, freedom bereft as far as possible of depth, of its intrinsic character, of all intrinsic or extrinsic content, is expressed in its immediate value This pride sounds rather like a boast In the following lines pride is explicitly described

But nature never fram'd a woman's heart  
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice,  
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,  
Misprising what they look on,

*Much Ado About Nothing*, III, i, 49

In the following passage, 'pride' is no more meant to describe a one-sided attitude

how these vain weak nails  
May tear a passage through the flinty ribs  
Of this hard world, my ragged prison walls,  
And, for they cannot, die in their own pride

*King Richard the Second*, V, v, 19

Here pride has nothing selfish in itself Rather it seems to depict naked life, its desperate effort, its ultimate claim and substance

Self-rejoicing cruelty is depicted in the following passage

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

And I, to make thee mad, do mock thee thus  
Stamp, rave, and fiet, that I may sing and dance

*Thurd Part of King Henry the Sixth*, I, iv, 90

Immmanence of value in the instant moment, in the fleeting moment, involving and absolving a higher claim

we have no friend  
But resolution, and the briefest end  
*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV xiii, 91

(Cleopatra speaking, cf the whole passage ) Compare also *Macbeth*, V, v, 48, 52 Courage, generous pride, pride in right-doing, moments of glory, are in such a way represented that in them one's life, and life absolutely, finds again or for the first time, in the fugitive hour, its full justification, its inward reward, requiting and avenging past and future infinitely Let me assemble some examples

More can I bear than you dare execute  
*Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*, IV, 1, 130

Here must I stay, and here my life must end  
*Thurd Part of King Henry the Sixth*, I, iv, 26

Let life be short, else shame will be too long  
*King Henry the Fifth*, IV, v, 23

O thou, the earthly author of my blood,  
Whose vouthful spirit, in me regenerate,  
Doth with a two-fold vigour lift me up  
To reach at victory above my head  
*King Richard the Second*, I, iii, 69

And in the closing of some glorious day  
• *First Part of King Henry the Fourth*, III, ii, 133

But in the midst of this bright-shining day,  
*Thurd Part of King Henry the Sixth*, V, iii, 3

Now stand you on the top of happy hours,  
*Sonnet XVI*

See above, §§ 8 and 10 Cf also *King John*, III, 1, 170, *Id* , V, 11,

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

88, *Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*, I, 1v, 35, *Julius Caesar*, III, 1, 159, and finally the passage

Our aery buildeth in the cedar's top,  
And dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun

*King Richard the Third*, I, iii, 264

Immanence of value may also be understood as characterizing the moment of the fully realized form, as contrasted with the moment of form in its promise, i e , with the moment of highest indeterminacy and *potency* If Shakespeare, as we have seen, loves the bud in its opening, he loves perhaps no less the rose full-blown These lines may be used as a kind of illustration

Their lips were four red roses on a stalk,  
Which in their summer beauty kiss'd each other

*King Richard the Third*, IV, iii, 12

24 Intelligence consists essentially in the spontaneous development of original values and forms, which perpetually and vitally rediscover their kinships in the intrinsic nature of original causality It consists in their self-realization in so far as it occurs in the subtle and highly plastic world of mental presentments It is not discordant with life, that is to say, life is not something irrational in relation to it, as has been frequently asserted, for this principle of original causality is the very principle of life, in its subjective or inner aspect It does not consist, except quite secondarily, in a more or less voluntary process in which the mental presentments are, let us say, manipulated in their objectively given existence, in other words, it does not consist in the abstract intellect Syllogisms have never made a man intelligent The same is true of *thought* It must not be conceived as a pseudo-theoretical, externally constructive and more or less masked will It shares the very principle of life This is forcibly expressed by saying that it is man's heart that thinks And it must be pointed out as particularly significant that this way of putting it is one favoured by Shakespeare It recurs frequently

How say you, then, would heart of man once think it?

*Hamlet*, I, v, 121.

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Compare, *First Part of King Henry the Fourth*, IV, 1, 84, *King Richard the Third*, I, 11, 83, and *Sonnet LXIX*, 2

These expressions, besides, share the merit of positing the subject (the active subject) of the activity of thought, not definitely on the particular self, but, as it were, nearer to the thinking itself, which is right, for indeed the real cause of thinking lies in thinking itself

The claim for one's identification with reality, beyond any given limit—never satisfied, ever renewed—constitutes the (subjective) principle of truth. Yet our intelligible world is brief. It forms, above all, the proper realm of art. Beyond this, there is all that which we must inferentially admit, but of which we have no intimate knowledge. Beyond this, again, there is all that which baffles even our subtlest mental presentments, and that which seems to us self-contradictory. The fundamental claims of thought for universality may be pointed out negatively, and in this consists in part, I think, the aesthetical and ontological value of such expressions as 'beyond the mark of thought' (cf *Antony and Cleopatra*, III, vi, 87), which occur not rarely and with peculiar power in Shakespeare's poetry (Cf *Romeo and Juliet*, IV, 1, 46, *Hamlet*, I, iv, 56, *Id.*, I, v, 166)

Truth is not conceived, by Shakespeare, as if its substance lay in its practical confirmation, or in a kind of correspondence between things and our representations of them. It is rather understood as a value of supreme identity with one's deepest self and with reality, a value of directness and simplicity, exceeding the particular occasion and interest, which is ultimately a passion, as love is, and grounded on the same principle. This is why the word 'truth' finds place at all, for instance, in the lines

- As gentle and as jocund as to jest,  
• Go I to fight truth has a quiet breast  
*King Richard the Second*, I, 111, 95

Compare *Measure for Measure*, III, 1, 211 (quoted above, § 22), *Troilus and Cressida*, III, 11, 176, *Id.*, IV, 1v, 104-8, *Macbeth*, IV, 111, 129, *Hamlet*, IV, 1v, 36 (cf below, § 36), *King Lear*, II, 11, 98. The very use of the word 'truth' in English—and, most remarkably, the twofold yet related meaning of the word 'true'—aids

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare to overcome the false, or merely superficial, distinction between the logical and ethical universal, as it is categorically asserted

The principle of coherence in truth is not anything external

More witnesseth than fancy's images,  
And grows to something of great constancy,

*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, V, 1, 25

(Cf also *Hamlet*, II, II, 211 ) The principle of truth exists already in imagination. The objectifying existential judgement, firstly, while positing the active subject not in the quality, but in an abstractly supposed something which should support the quality, is in many cases liable to mean *less* and not *more* truth, secondly, it is not necessarily or essentially absent in imagination, thirdly, it does not constitute truth's very principle and substance. We must not make of it, of the 'existential judgement', an idol, endowed as it were with mysterious, unintelligible, and so much the more extravagant powers. Imaginative and historical thought differ only gradually, and for many quite intelligible and not esoteric reasons. This character of gradualness reflects the very nature of the ever-renewing synthesis, seeking an ever wider absorption of past experiences and of all reality into the actuality of the present. Now, as regards the lines just quoted, it seems to me that this vitally gradual character somehow finds expression in them (cf 'grows to something') and that they owe to this, in part, both their ontological truth and their beauty.

25 Let us now revert to the subject of the quality *as active*. When the quality is not propped upon a 'substantive', as upon something which supports it and which is regarded as the real substance, when quality is itself the substantive reality, then at the same time we know it as a principle of wide transparency, and we know spirit in it. We know a new certainty, of incomparable value, an uncorrupted origin of light, infinite in its immanent truth, in which we intimately participate.

It is the proper character of poetical, as opposed to prosaic thought, to rescue quality from being a mere attribute of the

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

objectified and solidified symbol of its conditions and antecedents

*Pleasure*, for instance, in the following passage, is a value—a quality—self-sustaining, self-purposive, active, it is not primarily conceived as the attribute or property of an object, or, on the other hand, as a definite, actual or assumed object

Her face the book of praises, where is read  
Nothing but curious pleasures,

*Pericles*, I, 1, 15

Compare above, § 16 Cf also *Much Ado about Nothing*, II, 1, 187-90, *King Richard the Second*, V, v, 9-11

26 *Alliteration and onomatopoeia* Qualities of things are diffusive and penetrative This is, I think, because any moment of sentiency whatever constitutes a moment of objectivity—which means self-activity, and implies, as I maintain, original indeterminacy, that is, a vitally potential and (tendentally) all-absorbing moment We must suppose, moreover, that in our brain, in a wide world of more or less living or half-living mental presentments—not their mere physiological conditions—every quality recognizes and calls up the like qualities, renewing and developing itself in them In the intense originality of poetical thought, the objects, in their qualities, are no longer exactly objects, but (active) subjects The material of expression, likewise, becomes an (active) subject Indeed the distinction between the objects and the material of expression fades away The objects are made—in a sense, and to a certain extent—material of expression Now, for instance, a sound of the thing represented, or of the sensuous expressive material, develops and originates itself again and again in the sound of the syllables A formative power, as it were, vivacious and pregnant, is in this way expressed A deep spontaneity, containing a value of originality (self-realization) and of infinity, is revealed In this lies the meaning of 'alliteration' and of 'onomatopoeia' The mere fact of the imitation of nature may prove cleverness, but has no aesthetic value It is nature (its qualities in the objects and in the means of expression) alive in and through the same principle, which accounts

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

for the not trifling value of these modes or forms of expression  
In their pervasive character, no less than in their rich spontaneity,  
lies a secret of freshness and intimacy, which transcends both  
mechanism and our particular, externally constructive will They  
occur frequently in Shakespeare's poetry, for instance

That bare-foot plod I the cold ground upon  
*All's Well that Ends Well*, III, iv, 6

Our knees shall kneel till to the ground they grow  
*King Richard the Second*, V, iii, 106

She bids you  
Upon the wanton rushes lay you down  
And rest your gentle head upon her lap,  
*And she will sing the song that pleaseth you,*  
And on your eye-lids crown the god of sleep,  
· Charming your blood with pleasing heaviness,  
*First Part of King Henry the Fourth*, III, 1, 213

When on the gentle Severn's sedgy bank,  
*Id*, I, iii, 98

I am a very foolish fond old man,  
*King Lear*, IV, vii, 60

no jutty, frieze,  
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird  
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle  
*Macbeth*, I, vi, 6

Both the negative form of the first two lines of the last passage,  
and the alliteration in the last line, are, in a different way, con-  
tributive to its unity The *negative* multiplies and widens each  
detail mentioned into something vague and rich, the last verse  
is more pregnant and, so to say, imbued with the qualities of the  
things represented, and, in its richness and fullness of form, an-  
swers the questioning somehow implied in the preceding verses  
Yet these are only particular ways, in thought's unobtrusive web  
and boundless unity Every landscape, if only translated into  
verbal images, acquires, or may acquire, a lightning-line trans-

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

parency, revealing a reality (a reality of thought) which did not exist, generally, in mere contemplation. Thus in the passage which contains the line

This precious stone set in the silver sea, .

*King Richard the Second*, II, 1, 46

But for that I must refer to the whole passage. In this line alliteration, as is generally (yet here most evidently) the case, originates not only in the quality of the sound, but—in the wide world of sentiency—also in the quality of the thing represented, for the sibilant consonant, the 's', seems, in this vivacity of thought, to be hardly separable from the image of silver and of the sea.

This blending of the material of the expression with the quality expressed is a common feature of all art. It enhances the primal and cosmic significance and the immediate value of realization, that is to say, of *materialization*.

27 Spirit, in Shakespeare's poetry, finds itself deep within the sensuous qualities of things. His very language celebrates and vividly discloses the eternal nuptials between spirit and matter. Also, most frequently, he finds in matter, instilled with life, life itself in its *elementary* aspects—not for that the less, but the more, instinct with good and evil.

But if it did infect my blood with joy .

*Second Part of King Henry the Fourth*, IV, v, 168

Leave wringing of your hands. peace! sit you down,

And let me wring your heart, for so I shall

If it be made of penetrable stuff,

If damned custom have not brass'd it so

That it is proof and bulwark against sense

*Hamlet*, III, iv, 34

In the following lines the infinite of the quality 'red' is made the plastic and largely contributive means of expression of the infinite—the highly potential and all-absorbing character—of pain and remorse .



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,

*Macbeth*, II, 11, 61

This vitally infinite and almost prodigiously expanding element is neither a provisional nor an illusive reality. It constitutes the ontological foundation of these lines, and makes them convincing and aesthetically justified. For otherwise, nothing could counter-balance the fact that it is false that this woman, weighed down with remorse, would speak thus about Neptune.

28 Meaning and the material of expression unite most remarkably in the rhythm. It is, in this respect, the spiritual essence, in its extremely radical modalities and values, which informs the sensuous material. For instance, and in the first place, in artistic activity, a profounder *death* means a profounder birth, a higher simplicity, a deeper harmony, irreplaceable, unmistakably revealing the whole personality of the author, reflecting how far his particular self is absorbed in the inward truth of his thought and almost consumed by it. And this obviously affects both the meaning and the rhythm of the verse. In the lines where Juliet says

It was the nightingale, and not the lark,

*Romeo and Juliet*, III, v, 2

in the whole passage, and in this verse particularly, the words arising from an almost Lethean forgetfulness and purity reflect both the character of poetical inspiration and Juliet's self-obliviousness, while she, in the enchantment of the hour, and of very love, forgets the mortal danger of her lover, and her own.

29 Every string of the bodily frame of the poet is made an instrument to the play of an omni-original principle, which bears its cause in itself, and is felt as all-pervasive, because it is felt as logically or genetically primal, and rooted in (inner) being in all its forms, intimately constituting them. The penetrative character of song, its value of universality, and the essential holocaust of the poet, are explicitly pointed out in the passages

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews,  
Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones  
*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, III, 11, 78  
therefore the poet

Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones, and floods,  
Since nought so stockish, hard, and full of rage,  
But music for the time doth change its nature  
The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils,  
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,  
And his affections dark as Erebus  
Let no such man be trusted

*The Merchant of Venice*, V, 1, 79

This would hardly be true in its literal meaning. But we must understand *music* as representative of art, and as that art which most directly reflects the intrinsic nature of inner being, and by which, in other words, the radical and most dynamic modes of psychic unity are expressed, in their intrinsic or *universal* value, unladen with external problems. Music is here the actual cause, in the fullness of its freedom, implying a present value of infinity or *virtuality*, and a deep eternity (intrinsic character) in it. It symbolizes *grace*, and grace encounters the greatest obstacles to its prevailing power precisely in two orders of things: either in that which is 'hard', or in that which is 'full of rage'. 'Hard' may be either inanimate things, or barren external will in its blind transcendence of original value and in its secret dislike and hate of intimate knowledge, 'full of rage' depicts an original value, form in its *exclusive* character.

30 *The concept of intrinsic purposiveness* The distinction between subject, object and means loses its meaning, has ultimately no subjective reality, when quality or value are intensely felt. Pains, unhappy results, difficulties, are for the lovers new tokens of love.

I'll be as patient as a gentle stream  
And make a pastime of each weary step,  
*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II, vii, 34

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Petrarch says

Ch'alla cagion, non all'effetto intesi  
Son i miei sensi, vaghi pur d'altezza <sup>1</sup>

It is not the result which really counts, but the *cause* which moves the lover, in which he is merged, and which is present and alive in every intermediate moment (in 'each weary step') This inward purposiveness and immanence of value can be met in all fields of activity, in life's deep spontaneity and intenseness

The nature and value of this intimate purposiveness is acutely described in the following passage

That sport best pleases that doth least know how,  
Where zeal strives to content, and the contents  
Die in the zeal of those which it presents,  
Their form confounded makes most form in mirth,  
When great things labouring perish in their birth  
*Love's Labour's Lost*, V, II, 516

' that does least know how' *Means* and *ends* are not objectified, they do not exist as such, they are a living part, a perpetually original element in the play ('sport') — 'Die in the zeal' The responses (the 'contents') 'die' in the very moment of our passionate longing for them (cf 'in the zeal'), which is present and alive in them — 'Their form confounded' A higher indeterminacy, the very fact that they are lost in their form (they 'perish') brings about perennially a more joyous moment, or form, undivided, unmixed, perfectly *one* ('makes most form in mirth', cf above, § 4)

That seeks not to find that her search implies,  
But, riddle-like, lives sweetly where she dies  
*All's Well that Ends Well*, I, III, 224

There is no distinction between the value of the thing which is our motive of action, and the cruel means which is employed to prevent this action

<sup>1</sup> Sonnet 'Cantai, or piango, e non men di dolcezza'

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Th' impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies, .

*Measure for Measure*, II, IV, 102

These *means*, indeed, as in a moment of fiery martyrdom, become a means of expression, and a value of realization, inseparable and indiscernible from any value whatever of one's actual judgement and action.

The so-called 'object' of our love, in this vivacity and *originality* of life and value, is not exactly an object, it constitutes love's very principle and substance. This is forcibly expressed by the words 'motives' and 'strong knots', as they occur in the lines

Why in that rawness left you wife and child—

Those precious motives, those strong knots of love—

*Macbeth*, IV, III, 26

It is difficult indeed to replace the word 'knot' with a better one, in order to signify the unity of values—the knot of values—and of its manifold objective conditions, which characterizes life's original and perennial cause. Let us quote here another passage, in which, again, the poet strives to take this word to an ultimate meaning

^ With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate  
Of life at once untie,

*Antony and Cleopatra*, V, II, 306

Beauty is a value fully immanent and is pure of all extrinsic action and extrinsic objects of action, powerfully, highly creative and yet, in a sense, ineffectual. It is 'ineffectual' in the sense that *extrinsic action*, in beauty's actual originality and value, is most essentially ruled out. This ultimate character of beauty is expressed in the following passages. And in this lies in part, as I maintain, both their truth and their aesthetic value. For fancy has no value or reality whatever, except for its inward truth, which is identically ontological, as regards psychic reality, and aesthetically significant.

How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,  
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

*Sonnet LXV*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

but she looks like sleep,  
As she would catch another Antony  
In her strong toil of grace

*Antony and Cleopatra*, V, 11, 347

31 Inward purposiveness is pre-eminently and most essentially the character of *expression*. In its acme, it is endued with a halo of eternity—which is not an illusion. For this inward purposiveness is the very soul of form. It reveals an actual causality, which is not arbitrarily felt as original, as intrinsically necessary, as presumably, and in some sense, universal.

The following lines depict deep spontaneity in its characteristic nature and value. Inward purposiveness, and immanence of value, and thoughts of eternity, are interwoven, mutually involved.

When you speak, sweet,  
I'd have you do it ever  
when you do dance, I wish you  
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do  
Nothing but that, move still, still so,  
And own no other function each your doing,  
So singular in each particular,  
Crowns what you are doing in the present deed,  
That all your acts are queens

*The Winter's Tale*, IV, 111, 136, 140

Individuality—which is implied, as I have pointed out (cf. above, § 22), in the very *novelty* of the act—finds also in full truth, and could hardly have failed to find, its place in the picture (cf. 'So singular in each particular')

The self-sustaining power of grace, unmindful of its multiple conditions—in a certain respect, prior to them—is expressed in an even more immediate way in the following lines, where we know it not only, or not so much, as it is supposed to exist in the thing represented, but more closely and directly in the very self-dependent image and in the rhythm of the verse.

Her clothes spread wide,  
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up,

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and indu'd  
Unto that element,

*Hamlet*, IV, vii, 176

The innocence and perpetuity of song bear her up for a while in spite of gravity, and her purity and innocence, and elemental nature itself, seem to partake of the same primal power

32 The spiritual lightness which Shakespeare often represents as characterizing both love and the lover, is made of the same elements. Everything extrinsic disappears. Love's original joy knows no object, no agent, no purpose—unless they are love itself, and the means are not properly means, but share in the value of love's realization. Love transcends, in the highest degree, objective multiplicity and, in a sense, its own form itself, and is, in this respect, essentially invisible, and the poet's words are once more true and exact when he speaks of 'love's invisible soul' (*Troilus and Cressida*, III, 1, 36). The almost incorporeal lightness of the lover is pointed out in the following passage

Here comes the lady O! so light a foot  
Will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint  
A lover may bestride the gossamer  
That idles in the wanton summer air,  
And yet not fall, so light is vanity  
*Romeo and Juliet*, II, vi, 16

(Most likely, the idea that it is vanity, and not spirit, which makes her so light, must be left to the particular point of view of the Friar.)

33 But it is above all in the world of mere imagination that consciousness finds this spiritual lightness—and is not referred to, or made the attribute of, a pre-existing subject, *plus* a lifeless object, and a merely instrumental means, each of them bereft, as far as possible, of anything really active.

This spiritual *lightness*, as I have tried to make clear, is not at

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

all unreal, on the contrary, it reveals the intrinsic nature of self-activity. It is therefore not idle to ask if the visible reality be not made of the same stuff. For, on the other hand, it is arduous to conceive *being*, unless it is pulverized *ad infinitum*, as entirely bereft of self-activity, that is to say, of subjectivity. Spiritual lightness, and at the same time pride of form, and the fleeting, ephemeral character of these values, and yet an intimation of their eternal and ontological character—these concepts are either explicitly or implicitly expressed in the verses

These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yes, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep

*The Tempest*, IV, 1, 148

It may be objected that the word 'dream' is here used to mean something which is nothing at all, utterly unreal, as the use of the same word by Shakespeare in other passages, and the very words 'insubstantial' and 'baseless' as here employed, would seem to confirm. I might answer that the problem involved exceeds the proper limits of poetical knowledge of self-activity, or else that such a conviction, if at all, belongs to the prosaic and not to the poetical thought of Shakespeare, in which prosaic (i.e., descriptive, externally constructive) thought both poets and philosophers are generally inferior to themselves. The latter would be, indeed, too easy an answer. Anyhow, the word 'dream', and the fantastic or imaginative reality for which it stands, possesses an ontological and cosmological value in the lines

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul  
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,

*Sonnet CVII*

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Here premonitory phenomena are interpreted as depending on a wide, almost Panic anticipation of both physical and mental events. The anticipation could only be conceived as mental in its character, leading or influencing the events in the normal plane of reality, connected with them through mental links. Its correspondence with the *normal* events could not conceivably depend on a merely physical relation between the two orders of phenomena.

34 ✓ Intrinsic purposiveness fundamentally describes a value which is conceived as perpetually born for its own sake and by its own grace (cf Chapter XV, § 29). It may constitute the *nucleus* of a feeling of wide universality, detached from all thought of human personality. This lighter and, in a sense, higher viewpoint is reflected, I think, in the passage

✓ Full fathom five thy father lies,  
Of his bones are coral made  
Those are pearls that were his eyes  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange

*The Tempest*, I, ii, 394

If Shakespeare had started from a pantheistic conception, his abstractly conceived idea might have made his thought less genuine and real and in some respects less true. There is in this very thought the fresh discovery of a wide point of view, independent of, or indifferent to, personal identity. We are not confronted here with a supposed 'mere image' which has nothing to do with truth and with thought. The image itself does not obliterate objective truth, but supersedes it. No illusion, in fact, no self-delusion is found in that image, no mere witticism, no mere forgetfulness—which in itself could not make for poetical value. The superseding of objective truth only testifies to an intensely original *truth*, intimate, intrinsically characterized. The image expresses a detached joy in the world of forms, and the latter is pointed out as that which is richer than we could ever image or prophesy. For there is in the contact with the world of



## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

matter an unforeseen richness of aspects *spirit*, though it contains actualization, form, shape and invention, could never foreshadow the kaleidoscopic richness of *chance*

35 It is my intent to show that Shakespeare's robust language is grounded on a spiritual essence, which deserves to be investigated and which it is idle either to assert or to deny. On the other hand, for many reasons, I must renounce examining how that same reality comes about and is implicitly expressed in the development of the action. Yet obviously the wordless, or almost wordless, act may sometimes be the fittest expression of the highly potential moment which constitutes life's most substantial reality. Or again, the rapid return of the self-active, creative, ever-initial unpredictable element in individual characters, whenever action slows into description—into a list of facts, as it were—is most impressive and revealing in the development of the play.

It may here also be remarked that, if by reading the passages, which I have quoted, in their full context they would generally acquire a richer meaning and a higher value, not a few, on the other hand, would then become more significant for quite a different reason. Not a few, indeed, rise up in the middle of artificial conceits, such as were fashionable in the seventeenth century. These passages are connected with the preceding and following lines only by occasional threads, and witness a profounder, genuine, self-dependent reality, of which they are born. And they seem, for that very reason, to indicate more convincingly and strikingly their genuine source—in which, and in which only, in my opinion, the real man Shakespeare, for all that he (we may presume) most deeply thought, and felt, and suffered, must be identified.

36 Original value can be crudely opposed or ignored and, in a sense, transcended. In asceticism it is not entirely transcended if it is denied, it is converted into, or replaced by, another value—though as far as possible self-denying, self-transcending, form-

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

less We are still in the sphere of cognitive and ethical individualism But there is a kind of blind transcendence, which is utterly at war with (original) value We find it either in self-centred or in social forms in avarice, in the practical utilitarian spirit, in conventionalism, in idolatrous or else simply barren adherence to objects of thought or action, to restrictions as such, to rules, to customs or to symbols In the spirit of this blindly transcendent will, a thing with no value at all has value because it lasts, and only for that reason, or because it serves for something else, even if this be without any value at all Is it substantially a mere exertion of the practical will? Is it a conservative urge of great consequence and meaning in nature's economy? Is it a means through which nature builds up the individuals as blind cells of strong practical organizations and political bodies? Is there, at its very spring, that same value of utterly empty potency, which still belongs to the spiritual essence, though in its most arid forms? Is it simply the externally- and objectively-minded attitude, which evades, according to its nature, and eventually hates, all intimate knowledge? Whatever it be, the very vocation of poetry calls the poet to vindicate value and spirit against this blindness

The fundamental opposition between, on the one hand, value and, on the other, the externally transcendent will, not only constitutes a constant motive-value in Shakespeare's plays, but is also explicitly mentioned as possessing a world-wide significance

Two such opposed foes encamp them still  
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will,  
*Romeo and Juliet*, II, iii, 27

Concerning the meaning of 'grace', cf above, § 21 Two things are opposed to grace habit, and hard will Regarding the first, cf the passage in *Hamlet*, III, iv, 34, quoted above, § 27, and the following line

That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,  
*Hamlet*, III, iv, 161

'Will'—in the restricted sense of the term, to which I am referring—is characteristically 'sharp' (cf *Hamlet*, III, iii, 39), either it

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

shares the nature of pride (cf *Love's Labour's Lost*, II, 1, 36), or, on the other hand, is identified with the 'heart' of man in so far as it is 'steel'd' by God for some strong purpose (*King Richard the Second*, V, 11, 34) Cf also *Julius Caesar*, III, 11, 98

Shakespeare's moral preferences seem to be indicated by the way he characterizes Lord Angelo, in 'Measure for Measure', who is an extremely dishonest person (as is disclosed in the plot) and at the same time a man who dominates and mortifies his feelings and his sensuous life

Upon his place  
Governs Lord Angelo, a man whose blood  
Is very snow-broth, one who never feels  
The wanton stings and motions of the sense,  
But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge  
With profits of the mind, study and fast  
*Measure for Measure*, I, iv, 55

Indeed, there is often more wisdom and more charity in sense, than in our planning will, presumptuous, and easily one-sided Or a like preference may perhaps be inferred from the way in which quite a different character is depicted, Cassius, representative, as it seems, of practical asceticism Caesar says

Would he were fatter! but I fear him not  
Yet if my name were liable to fear,  
I do not know the man I should avoid  
So soon as that spare Cassius  
Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort  
As if he mock'd himself, and scorn'd his spirit  
That could be mov'd to smile at any thing.  
*Julius Caesar*, I, 11, 197

Also, 'he hears no music' (*Id*, 1d, 203) Let us remember, moreover, in this connection, that Richard the Third, the arch-fiend, hates and despises all lingering in the pleasure of the moment, and finds it 'idle', the 'pleasing of a lute' he finds 'lascivious', and the 'time of peace' a 'weak piping' (*King Richard the Third*, I, 1, 13, 24, 31)

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare does not commend the man who strictly believes in the chain of utilities and pursues the particular given ends and depends upon them, but the man who lives, as it is said, in the grace of God, and is concerned with the good as an original, genuine value, intimately rather than extrinsically purposive (cf above, §§ 3, 30) Hamlet says to Horatio

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice  
And could of men distinguish, her election  
Hath seal'd thee for herself, for thou hast been  
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,  
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards  
Hast ta'en with equal thanks,

*Hamlet*, III, II, 68

The human is opposed to the political and social, for instance

Thou art thyself though, not a Montague  
*Romeo and Juliet*, II, II, 39

Cf also *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, IV, I, 59, *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, I, 34, *The Merchant of Venice*, IV, I, 193, *Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*, III, I, 62, *Troilus and Cressida*, III, III, 81, *Timon of Athens*, III, II, 93 Yet, obviously, this essential opposition reveals its *truth*, which strikes the inmost string of the human heart, especially in the development of the action

The same opposition rises, in so far as the nature of thought is especially concerned, as a contrast between the originality of thought itself and, on the other hand, either a control over thought, or a voluntary element implied in one's one-sided adherence to the objective or external moment of the synthesis. There is 'assuredness' in the *abstract intellect*, in the calculating, abstract reason, which hinders and chains, as it were, the spirit of grace and of truth, and belongs more to the practical will than to really cognitive thought. It is in the questioning, rather than in the answer, that the spirit of truth abides. This logical, and ontological, principle is reflected in the lines

man, proud man,  
Drest in a little brief authority,

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,

*Measure for Measure*, II, II, 117

Compare also, in this connection, *Hamlet*, IV, IV, 41

As regards external control over thought, Isabella, the heroine of the play 'Measure for Measure,' says, 'thoughts are no subjects' (V, 1, 454, cf. *King Richard the Second*, V, v, 9). That thought cannot be placed under authority or control, is ultimately true—so far as the very concept of the originality of thought is grounded in reality. On the other hand, an eagle-like dominance of his own thought is characteristic of Shakespeare's poetry. Yet this is hardly *voluntary*, in the specific meaning of the word, it neither means the subservience of thought to anything extrinsic, nor does it seem to affect and to impair its natural development and deepening. This dominance may rather be identified with the serenity of all-comprehensive truth, which informs the very accent and rhythm of the words of Hamlet in some passage (cf. *Hamlet*, III, 1, 70-6), or with that 'most sovereign reason' (*Id.*, III, 1, 166), which Ophelia admired in him. Compare the lines

Sure he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after,

*Hamlet*, IV, IV, 36

In the passage to which I have referred, § 2 (*Hamlet*, III, 1, 84), the words 'the pale cast of thought', whatever be their meaning with strict reference to the context, seem to reflect, in their original expressive value, the proper quality of a high serenity and of all-comprehensive truth, which rarely allows for such obliviousness as the vivacity and the very possibility of the synthesis require.

37 Thus, or in like manner, the wide rose of the psyche opens and unfolds itself in the words and images of Shakespeare, developing and deepening one genetical principle. He does not look for profundity—for the 'inner', much less for an intimate aspect of life—according to the puerile and merely spatial scheme for which those things are 'deep' or 'inner' that belong to inferior or hidden strata of the living organism. He sees and deepens any

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

aspect whatever of life and consciousness *in its face-value*, he is watchful of the kinships—in life's manifold aspects—at *their face-value*, and the discovering of them is, *at its face-value*, vitally a cause, an inward, immanent cause in the expression. He does not replace consciousness with the subconscious, the unconscious, the complexes, the instincts, the subliminal.

Modern schools of art and poetry have eventually understood that beauty does not properly lie in the object which is represented or contemplated. Hence they have been encouraged to look for the subjective element. This critical point of view is, or may be, justified. But it is a sheer mistake to believe that this element can be better discovered by looking for it in the subconscious life, in dreams, and in magic. A thing is no less an *object* for the mere fact of being sought or envisaged in the subconscious. Rather did the ancient painters, who reproduced always the same Madonna, show, by their action, that the object did not constitute the whole of their art, that they looked for novelty not in the novelty or extravagances of the object, or of the means of expression, but in the new transparency and simplicity, the new truth and absoluteness, and spirituality in and through which the object was realized. Frantically and hopelessly, and in fact too much blinded in external (though subconscious) objectivity, many a modern artist or poet seeks the subjective and original element, and finds again and again objects, and remains in the aridity and arbitrariness of the abstractly objective view. He ignores the real source of depth, which lies in consciousness, no matter if it be the ordinary consciousness of the waking state or a less apparent one. The essential and common characters of consciousness, in a kind of philosophical barbarism, are forgotten, and the name of consciousness is lost. All is traced to something else. Consciousness—and conscience—either in art and literature, or in so-called 'realistic' politics, is considered as only a net of illusions, something to be entirely traced to, or made dependent upon, something else.

But Shakespeare's works have, in this respect, the merit of being the strongest bulwark against modern psychology. So long as Shakespeare continues to have influence on the English language, it will be difficult for English-speaking people to forget

## WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

the soul for the complexes, the instincts, the subconscious, the unconscious, or the tropisms. Indeed, the same well-deserving quality, or influence, can be ascribed to all poetry. But as regards Shakespeare, it is in a particularly high degree that the non-composite principle of subjectivity shows, as it were, under our very eyes, its *absolutely inherent* richness and depth.

## Chapter 2

### JOHN MILTON

1608-1674

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1 The relation between the light dependent on the sense of sight and, on the other hand, inner light and inspiration, seems to have been a constant subject of Milton's thoughts, during and before his blindness (He became blind when he was forty-four years old)

In 'Comus' (1637) he writes

Virtue could see to do what Virtue would  
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon  
Were in the flat sea sunk

*Comus A Mask*, 373

But is it not a mere figure of speech to call 'light' a subjective state not directly dependent on the organ of sight?

Let us mention some sources—distinct, though closely related—of the meaning of the expression 'inner light', in connection, especially, with art and poetry

(1) *Certainty* The *cogito* carries within itself a peculiar proof of its own reality. There is in thinking—in all intimate *making*—a value of reality which is not simply inferential and relative, that is to say, dependent on other things assumed as real. We find it also in arbitrary will, and in abstract reasoning, but much more when thought is in a higher degree creative, formative. Thought, in its irreplaceable, original character, is ever and again



## JOHN MILTON

imagination, in the wider and deeper meaning of the word, and possesses an inventive power of form and an immediate value ('light') of reality

(2) *Universality* Writers and artists, in their persevering effort, are sustained above all by a light, which is thought itself bringing forth and revealing a perennial identity through the wealth of its specifications. This is the gradual realization and discovery of vital kinships in life's different aspects. This is the feeling of the here and now as containing, as it were, a seed of the cosmos.

(3) *Immediacy* Every judgement is ultimately immediate, and simple, non-composite. In our judgement about right and wrong we must indeed take into account, so far as we are able to do so, all traditions and rules and authorities and examples and experiences, yet in the last resort it must be unconceived, fresh. The same is true as regards the logical judgement. In that way of reasoning, in which we assume that we can adhere to preceding conclusions, without reviving them in their true meaning and freely recalling them again in the final conclusion, our very soul of judgement is confounded. This immediate—and simple—character of judgement is an essential aspect of the synthesis, it is the very synthesis as expression, as form, as an *event of light*.

(4) *Imponderability* The formless, boundless intensity which is in the forming—the moment of the mental synthesis, which exceeds and effaces form, though form be the cause and end of its being—this self- and form-transcendence is felt as freedom, and release from bondage, as a self-sustaining, actual infinity, as a moment of inward light.

The series does not claim to be complete. Now in all these connections, either to express certainty, or depth, or immediacy, or simplicity, or spiritual lightness, not only the sense of sight, but hearing, and touch, and all senses could have afforded, and indeed do afford, suitable words. 'Touch', for instance, may be an adequate term even to describe imponderability. We speak of the touch of a master, of the delicate touch of a writer. On the other hand, 'light' is sometimes represented by poets as an opaque something, which *hides* a deeper infinity, a reality more powerfully *one*, as a disturbing element which robs us of solitude and intimacy.

## JOHN MILTON

Why then is the primordial contact, which is already (as I suppose, and I think I must suppose) unity, and *spirit*, while reaching its most elaborate and its highest forms, identified with 'light'? Why is the word 'light' preferred at all in order to describe its nature? The explanation of this lies, no doubt, in historical, numberless 'second' causes. If men were utterly eyeless, presumably we should not speak of the 'light of consciousness' rather would our vocabulary be richer in other directions, and we should more frequently mention the 'voice of consciousness', its heaviness, its lightness, its silences, its sweetness, its bitterness, and another word would probably not only replace the word 'light', but sound for us almost like it.

But, on the other hand, external light—I do not mean its physical conditions, but our perception of it—would not, from the very first, exist, without those possibilities and intrinsic characters of the synthesis which we emphatically know as developed in and through it—which might have developed in touch, and sound, and taste, and smell, but have in fact developed in the sense of sight.

As things are, daylight still makes a landscape the hymn of the soul. Visible light, in its unobtrusive and imponderable character, and in its sovereign power of revealing the shapes and colours of external objects, most adequately expresses and is apt to symbolize the twofold value of form and infinity. When Milton, like others before and after him, says that 'God is light' (*Paradise Lost*, III, 3), the expression is happy and powerful and, I think, only comes into being at all because the simplicity and richness of the original freedom, its infinity and depth, which is akin with love's, are in some way contained in sensuous light. Grace, and Wisdom, the highest earthly names of the same richly qualified freedom, likewise find in light a symbol and a name. For thought in its highly original nature, in its perpetual novelty, and uniqueness, and individuality, as well as in its constant, intrinsic character—in all its implied values and modes—finds expression, and *reality*, immediately in the perceived interplay of light and darkness, of splendours and shades. There is no break, in fact, that we may see or feel, between inner and visible light.

Indeed self-activity, or the active principle, is laboriously speci-

## JOHN MILTON

fied in and through the organ of sight, yet still the same It attains incomparable powers and wealth without losing its simplicity It becomes in practice most efficient, without losing its link eternal

Yet, on the other hand, this specification through the organ of sight makes it in a high degree fragile, precarious This precariousness, as contrasted with such exceeding power and value, suggests the following question

Since light so necessary is to life,  
And almost life itself, if it be true  
That light is in the soul,  
She all in every part, why was the sight  
To such a tender ball as th' eye confined,  
So obvious and so easy to be quenched,  
And not, as feeling, through all parts diffused,  
That she might look at will through every pore?

*Samson Agonistes*, 90

The highly specified nature of the organ of sight makes it less easily replaceable and in many ways more delicate This is obvious But a higher problem is involved in this impassioned and at the same time serene questioning In his poem 'On the Portrait of a Beautiful Woman, Sculptured on the Sepulchral Monument of the Same',<sup>1</sup> Leopardi asks, with almost the same accent of impassioned truth, how it can be that now beauty shines forth, apparently witnessing more than human realms and destinies, and then suddenly, through the most trifling accidents, all is lost, and what was most beautiful becomes, in a moment, corrupted, horrible to see and revolting This is the central problem about the nature of value It is the problem of *value* in its extreme nakedness It is the problem of God directly faced *How can the deep intrinsic character of value be entirely suspended upon given particular conditions—and, moreover, upon its creative novelty?*

Why is not value also, or in a higher degree, *power*? Why does it not overcome its conditions—as it ought to overcome them, for this belongs, in tendency, to its very nature—to the point of

<sup>1</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Poesie* Sopra il ritratto di una bella donna, scolpito nel monumento sepolcrale della medesima

## JOHN MILTON

making itself independent of this or that particular set of conditions, easily replacing them? Yet it is not so, as the Chorus of the Danites answers

For inward light, alas!  
Puts forth no visual beam  
*Id*, 162

2 However, this inextricable identity of form and infinity—the very principle of subjectivity—if it has lost its most brilliant and efficient function, its most precious set of conditions, is not entirely amiss and can find another form of expression, which seems in some way less dependent on specialized organs Milton describes his blindness

Thus with the year  
Seasons return, but not to me returns  
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,  
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine,  
But cloud instead and ever-during dark  
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men  
Cut off, and, for the book of knowledge fair,  
Presented with a universal blank  
Of Nature's works,

*Paradise Lost*, III, 40

Yet, precisely because the sense of external light radically shares, as I maintain, in the very nature of thought's originality, he is in full truth calling, a few lines further on, for inspiration as for a kindred power

So much the rather thou, Celestial Light,  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate,

*Id*, 1d, 51

It is not clearly stated, in this passage, whether the light of inspiration is referred to, or, more generally, the supreme Deity Inspiration is unequivocally concerned in the lines

## JOHN MILTON

Descend from Heaven, Urania,  
The meaning, not the name, I call, for thou  
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top  
Of old Olympus dwell'st, but heavenly-born,  
Before the hills appeared, or fountain flowed,  
Thou with eternal wisdom didst converse,

*Id*, VII, 1, 5

Modern scientism would consider any such appeal as fictitious, or now out of date. Yet it is *scientifically* less one-sided than is modern scientism. Unhappily the notion of the originality of thought, with which that of inspiration must be ultimately identified, is to-day not only ignored, it is ignorantly ruled out.

Psychical researchers themselves generally, among them Frederick W. H. Myers, undoubtedly a great thinker, refer inspiration and genius to the subliminal. This is, in my opinion, an awkward way of displacing the problem, by putting it a little further off, and while also satisfying the uncritical urge to derive everything from something else, and a way of losing the very content of the problem and its proper ground, where it can be fruitfully studied. The same is true when inspiration is traced to the subconscious, or to the physiological. To refer it to Apollo, on the other hand, or to the Muses, or even to eternal Wisdom, is, firstly, less compromising. A certain degree of immanence of the formative power is not denied, it is even recognized. Secondly, the same symbols may be interpreted as pointing to the height of the value concerned, to the difficulties and immensity of the problem involved—which is nothing less than that of the origins—and to its inexhaustible character, its cosmological significance.

But the modern man is justified, he is right. While the notion of the originality of thought—and of a psychic (positive, active) indeterminacy—is not vindicated in its full logical value, the modern man cannot be condemned for his attitude. For in a world of mere objective existents there is no place for inspiration—any more than for freedom, and for real becoming, and creativity. There is only place, in such a world, for indeterminacy conceived as fortuitousness, as scientists generally conceive it, and for necessity (rigid laws, conditional relations), and for a

## JOHN MILTON

mixture of the two—that is, of fortuitousness and necessity—which has nothing to do with freedom and value

In the lines last quoted inspiration is represented in the likeness of the Wisdom spoken of in the Scriptures (*Proverbs*, viii, 30, 31), who was with God, singing and dancing, in all God's works, since the first days of creation, and from the very beginning, and whom we may understand as personifying the *actual cause* in its original values and forms and in their integrity <sup>1</sup> Compare *Paradise Lost*, I, 17, III, 1, *Paradise Regained*, I, 8

Some more particular aspects of inspiration are explicitly mentioned. The 'unpremeditated' character of the verse is emphasized (*Paradise Lost*, IX, 24). Inspired thoughts are, at the same time, 'voluntary'—that is to say, neither fortuitous, nor compelled, spontaneous, mental (cf. *Paradise Lost*, III, 37, quoted below, § 3)

This word 'unpremeditated', in the same connection, recurs frequently in English poetry. Its meaning may seem obvious. Yet the poetical-cognitive value of the word itself, as used in a piece of genuine poetry, can be overlooked. If the verse were 'unpremeditated' simply because occurring unexpectedly as if owed to chance, this would not account for the value implied in the word. The same is true, if the verse were 'unpremeditated' simply because it was suggested by hidden strata of consciousness, or provoked by unknown physiological conditions, or, for instance, through the secret influence of the stars. The word, if we do not lose sight of the value conveyed by it, opens up the problem of something which is not entirely derived, but in some way self-originating.

Or, leaning still to the abstractly objective view of existence (as objective idealism does), the 'unpremeditated' element is referred to transcendent ideas or prototypes, immobile and timeless. This is indeed the worst blasphemy. For it covers with an idealistic mask what might be, perhaps, acceptable in a world of mechanism, where time and becoming may be more easily supposed to have no ultimate meaning. These timeless ideas are the absolute denial of all value for which they are alleged to stand. They can be justified only as a first desperate attempt to discover

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my work, *Il concetto dell'indeterminazione*, § 65

## JOHN MILTON

or to recognize and seize in the very nature of thought something radically intrinsic to it, realizing itself again and again through time and space, self-characterized. This may explain sometimes, if not justify, the favourable approach of poetry to this conception. For the value of the unpremeditated character of inspiration, of imagination, of creative thought, or of unforbidden memories arising, lies precisely in the discovery of something real in itself, self-suspended, in thought's activity, qualitatively characterizing and in some sense dominating its conditions, rather than being ultimately derived from them, showing precisely in its luminous creative novelty an intrinsic (*eternal*) character of thought.

To this conception is akin another, namely, that no light or reality of thought can be brought about or constructed at will, and that the thinker is met with a blank, or the poet is 'mute' (cf *Paradise Regained*, I, 12), if spirit, which is at any moment a reality of potency, free, does not itself act. Indeed thought, in the widest acceptance of the word, and not only inspired thought, is always 'mute', except by its own grace. Even the most arbitrary act is, in the last resort, original. It is intrinsically characterized. It could not be invented by us or replaced by all our devices. Inspiration, and genius—which might be defined as *quality active*—are only expressive of that which, in a lesser degree, belongs to the general nature of thought.

Poetical inspiration is then, as described in the passages referred to, unpremeditated (however much its antecedents may be laborious and painful) and irreplaceable. It possesses, moreover, a direct moral value (cf below, § 4) enlightening, and heightening, and purifying.

And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer  
Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,  
Instruct me, for Thou know'st, Thou from the first  
Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,  
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss,  
And mad'st it pregnant what in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support,

*Paradise Lost*, I, 17

## JOHN MILTON

3 If the inmost source of song is found in the feeling of the intrinsic or *eternal* character of self-activity, it does not seem unlikely that darkness, *qua* felt, in its indeterminacy, in its infinitude, may be especially propitious to inspiration itself. This at least seems to be the case with Milton. He recalls his blindness, and then adds

Yet not the more  
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt  
Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,  
Smit with the love of sacred song,  
Then feed on thoughts that voluntary move  
Harmonious numbers, as the wakeful bird  
Sings darkling, and, in shadiest covert hid,  
Tunes her nocturnal note

*Id*, III, 26, 37

But the idea of the indeterminate and *potential* as an overwhelming reality is persistently and explicitly sought

To the loss of that,  
Sufficient penalty, why hast thou added  
The sense of endless woes?

*Id*, X, 752

And he the future evil shall no less  
In apprehension than in substance feel,

*Id*, XI, 774

See also *Id*, X, 780-3, XI, 766-9

The very word 'virtual' is brought back to its *positive* meaning, which is found in common language, but is rejected by the philosophy of 'being' as essentially *given*<sup>1</sup>. All philosophy for which the touchstone of being lies in objective (either material or so-called ideal) existence and which ignores intimate becoming, or relegates it to a secondary place, or to the world of

<sup>1</sup> 'Being', 'ontological'. I use these words as implying a claim for reality in its ultimate meaning, whatever this may be. 'Being', in my opinion, should not be confined to denote 'being' as opposed to 'becoming'. It is the word for reality, both subjective and objective. It is for me above all intimate, active, self-sustaining being. With reference to objective multiplicity and to the abstractly objective moment of thought, I prefer to use the word 'existence', in such expressions as, for instance, 'mere objective existence', 'external existence'.



## JOHN MILTON

illusions, bereaves the words 'virtual', 'potential', 'potentiality', 'potency' and 'essence' of the meaning which they possess in ordinary and poetical language. In the most representative systems of such philosophy, these words are used as signifying an inferior degree of reality, unless sometimes common language has its revenge, or at any rate a quite different meaning is conveyed, by the addition of the word 'active', in the expressions 'active potency' and 'active essence'. Rightly, in my opinion, the above-mentioned words in ordinary and poetical language point, very often, to profound and dominant realities, and are meant to refer to spirit, not to matter, not to the mere *conditions* of actuality. For the potential, or virtual, expresses the very reality of freedom. It contains the many in one. It makes the simplicity of thought. It is known as an actual, boundless presence. The word 'virtual' possesses, as I say, a positive meaning in the passage

his omnipresence fills  
Land, sea, and air, and every kind that lives,  
Fomented by his virtual power and warmed

*Id.*, XI, 336

Compare also, for the same sense of a *possibility* which is an actual value, a power in the present moment, and which makes the very force of the presentment

and thence diffuse  
His good to worlds and ages infinite

*Id.*, VII, 190

We might try perhaps to explain the value of the *possible* pragmatically for instance, because of the hopes it excites and the cumulated presentments of the many alluring things, promised or possible. But, if only we begin to know the intrinsic nature of the mental synthesis, the notion of the possible—which is akin to that of the future, and of freedom, and of infinity—appears to belong essentially to it. Moreover, without this immediate reality of potency, this intensive element of which I am speaking, the notion of the possible, let alone its tremendous power, could not *conceivably* arise.

It is probably not without relation to the place that the *virtual*

## JOHN MILTON

holds in Milton's attitude of mind, that the word 'hope', rather than 'joy', is used in his poems as providing the concretest expression of life's power of realization. He brings this word to a peculiarly strong degree of reality—to an ultimate, bare, ontological significance. Thus in the last line of the following passage, where he speaks of deceitful women,

Skilled to retire, and in retiring draw  
Hearts after them tangled in amorous nets  
Such object hath the power to soften and tame  
Severest temper, smooth the rugged'st brow,  
Eneive, and with voluptuous hope dissolve,  
*Paradise Regained*, II, 161

Compare also

Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,  
*To the Nightingale*, 3

Soon we shall see our hope, our joy, return  
*Paradise Regained*, II, 57

So much I feel my genial spirits droop,  
My hopes all flat nature within me seems  
In all her functions weary of herself,  
*Samson Agonistes*, 594

Let us also remark, in this last passage the direct and limpid way in which life is represented—naked, ultimate, as an original, self-sustaining power, as that which possesses or must find in itself its principle and strength, not derived or not entirely derived. The like direct presentment of being as a self-dependent reality is conveyed by the expression 'with utter loss of being' (*Paradise Lost*, II, 440)

In echoes and silences, we wonder at something unseen, the more intensely real because of its highly potential character—carrying far and near its ever-renewing call. Milton is watchful of this spell

The air such pleasure loth to lose,  
With thousand echoes still prolongs each heavenly close  
*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, 99

## JOHN MILTON

There is more than sweetness in the vanishing echoes, there is the implicit consciousness of thought's distinct reality. The *infinite* of the quality, in and through which every 'close' is extended, constitutes the very warp and woof of thought. The airy element, as here described, is both *form* (cf. 'pleasure', 'echoes', 'each close') and, on the other hand, vital *infinity* (cf. 'still prolongs', 'loth to lose') so that the lines depict *thought* in its essential qualities, constitute, as it were, a picture of it.

The following passage penetratingly represents almost the same moment of expectancy and actual infinity.

The Angel ended, and in Adam's ear  
So charming left his voice that he a while  
Thought him still speaking, still stood fixed to hear,  
*Paradise Lost*, VIII, 1

The feeling of something present, invisible, almost shapeless and highly *potential*, may be connected in Milton's poetry with his musical vocation, and with his blindness, but not necessarily. It could be, in any case, and quite hypothetically (in so far as I know) only a presage of the latter. The last-but-one passage quoted, for instance, belongs to his earlier poems. And to the stanzas prefacing the same Hymn belong the following lines, which seem to contain the expression, though quite different, and not explicit, of fundamentally the same concept-value.

and here with us to be  
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,  
*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, 12

The word 'forsook' (a *negative* one) is, if I am not mistaken, the very key to the amplitude of the image—while making the 'courts' and the 'everlasting day' less *objectively* and more *potentially* present.

He hails 'divinest Melancholy' (cf. *Il Penseroso*, 12), who hides him 'from day's garish eye' (*Id.*, 141), and seems to carry him beyond the sight of all clear-cut shapes and distinct aspects of things. Cf. also *Id.*, 165, 175.

The following most remarkable line also belongs to his earlier poems.

## JOHN MILTON

Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,  
*To the Nightingale, 5*

The thinking subject, growing weary of the particular objects of sight and thought and effort, finds in the song of the nightingale, and in the coming night, oblivion and rest, and a transparent and all-pervasive value and power of form, unbroken in its identity, unrestrained by any boundary. Yet all this could hardly explain the amplitude and fullness of the verse, which seems suspended from, or filled with, a *virtual power*, an infinitude, a transparency, akin to that of the 'liquid notes', but still profounder, more central and intimate in the creative principle, more detached from any *given* element of form.

4 In the following passage there is not one single thing with distinct outlines—none that the grammarians would call a 'concrete noun', except a few which are very indefinite, in the expressions 'her face'—yet 'veiled', 'her person', 'no face'. It refers to Milton's deceased wife, seen in a dream—his second wife, Catherine Woodcock, who died in childbirth (1658).

Came vested all in white, pure as her mind  
Her face was veiled, yet to my fancied sight  
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined  
So clear as in no face with more delight  
*On his Deceased Wife, 9*

We find here strikingly the same serenity and spirituality, and perfection of form, as in some of the most beautiful stanzas of Petrarch, yet the use of the essences without place or shape is even more daring and absolute. These are quite radical concepts of the mental synthesis, highly indetermined, yet, in the verse, so much the more alive. Besides, the word 'delight', as it is used at the end of the passage quoted, appears like a jewel in a translucent sea, and satisfies our claim for the finite. The 'white', and the 'pure', and 'love', and 'sweetness', and 'goodness', and the 'clear', all these terms express here the (in tendency) self- and form-transcending value of deep original freedom, that is, of the

## JOHN MILTON

active principle in its *potential* intensity, and in its primal character

These are obviously moral values. *Moral values* are not apt to constitute the extrinsic object of art, in so far as any *extrinsic* end whatever is at war with, and tends to stifle and exclude, the essentially original, vitally present value of art. But, in their intrinsically purposive reality, which forms their outstanding character, they not only enter decisively into the content of a work of art, they constitute, or may constitute, its very motive-value. Whoever says that art is a-moral, puts awkward, false schemes in the place of that which he does not see or know, unless his assertion has only a polemical character, depending on false views which it is intended to correct. Now this is especially evident in the passage just quoted. If the poet had spoken of pride, the verse would not have attained the same height, the same or the like powerful, wide, intimate, self-sustaining reality, and, though perfect, it would possess an inferior degree of perfection, even from the purest aesthetical point of view. It may be significant, in this connection, to quote another passage, which is perfect in its turn, but certainly not comparable with the one just quoted, in which Dalila is described, who, with all her charms, comes towards Samson, hoping to deceive him again. The chorus of the Danites is wondering at her appearance, and says

But who is this, what thing of sea or land?  
Female of sex it seems,  
That, so bedecked, ornate, and gay,  
Comes this way sailing,  
Like a stately ship

*Samson Agonistes*, 710

If processes of things can be better explained in and through their highest records, the lines just quoted from the sonnet *On his deceased Wife* certainly contain the cause and the justification of Milton's faith in his poetical vision, which sustained him, and also deceived him—as is generally the case, with all writers—whenever of the same costly metal we see only the dross

5 The knowledge of the spirit is always a feast, however

## JOHN MILTON

laborious and tragic the process which it may presuppose or involve. Hence the following lines are especially true:

How charming is divine Philosophy!  
Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,  
But musical as is Apollo's lute,  
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,

*Comus A Mask, 476*

Philosophy may be understood in various meanings of the word, and especially it may be intended to deal with three different fields of knowledge and may accordingly have three different definitions:

(1) It may concern cosmological problems, the knowledge of the universe, all-inclusive. In this respect the scientist is, or would be, by far the best qualified. But he ought to know or study also the nature of thought, of inner being. Two different attitudes and competences, however, would then be required, which may hardly be found in the same person. In fact this philosophy does not in practice exist, or only in quite unsatisfactory forms.

(2) It may concern a critical study of the thought, and the processes of research, of each particular science. A beginning of such critical study of scientific thought is found in every treatise of science—physical and moral sciences as well. But we find it only as rudimentary, except for the history of mathematical and historical thought. The same incompatibility of attitudes just alluded to prevents its development.

(3) It may concern the study of the nature of thought and subjectivity. This is the specific competence of philosophy. Why then is psychology not philosophy? Psychology is not philosophy only because it does not take into account—as it ought to take into account—the fundamental, theoretically (no less than practically) most important problems of mental reality, which have been the main concern of philosophy through more than two thousand years. The different attitudes of men, however, may to a certain extent justify its distinct existence in particular fields of research.

Philosophical knowledge, in this its specific competence, can only be intimate—a knowledge through a kind of identification, self-active, formative, creative, and, in this sense, *poetical*.

## Chapter 3

### THOMAS GRAY

1716-1771

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1 Thomas Gray is beyond any doubt not a mystic. So much the less may suspicion arise that in his frequent references to inspiration there may be an over-emphasis, reflecting the ethical will rather than the naked and genuine, unforced cognitive-poetical expression, or 'experience'.

'Rapture', 'bright Rapture', 'gen'rous spark', 'soft controul', 'genuine ardor', are so many names for inspiration in his poems, and also, referring to closely kindred concepts and feelings, 'untaught harmony', in the line

The untaught harmony of spring

*Ode on the Spring, 7*

This word 'untaught', and others which express the same conception, recur frequently in English poetry, and here also, and here especially, it is highly suggestive, it has a remarkable immediate value and content. For indeed, in my opinion, it does not simply mean that the singing of the birds, to which, among other things, it refers, is *untaught, because instinctive*. It points to elemental forms of feeling and being which are neither apprehended, nor simply hereditary or derived.

That this thought was not absent from Gray's mind, that this very use of the word 'untaught' must be connected with it, is indicated or confirmed in his 'Hymn to Ignorance', where he, an

## THOMAS GRAY

eager scholar, exalts ignorance not only as a rest from 'wit's delusive ray' and from the wearing labyrinth of derivative causes and explanations, not only as another name for the 'dews Lethean', but, most likely, even as the renewed nuptials of the soul with a primordial faith, which is above the wisdom of the body and its accumulated organizations and instincts, and, on the other hand, above conscious items of knowledge. He says

Ah, Ignorance! soft salutary power!  
Prostrate with filial reverence I adore

*Hymn to Ignorance, 9*

Ignorance in the ordinary meaning of the word is self-centred, presumptuous, pitiless and senseless and shallow. But here it seems to be something profound. In fact it seems to be here, if I may guess, a power of renewal, a fresh and rich innocence. In another passage, though driving ignorance away, disparagingly, he says that it has 'looks profound' (*Ode for Music*, 3), as if even there he could not entirely renounce such a conception, according to which ignorance is neither blind, exclusive pride, nor a mere *tabula rasa*, but a virgin power.

He who has reached the world of essence is left with few words and no abounding ostensible items of knowledge. He finds himself rich with a nutshell of concepts which cannot be labelled—which are most radically related to the unity of the mental synthesis and its intrinsically characterized possibilities. Besides, he knows how lame his knowledge is, in face of so many a problem. Again, the *feeling* of ignorance may be one with the very spirit of truth. All this, and much more, can be found in 'ignorance'. But, I think, both in the first and in the second passage quoted, it is above all the *untaught* harmony, and wisdom, at which the poet is wondering, and which deservedly rivets his attention. For no reference to instincts could intelligibly explain its value, and it involves the problem of an original causality and of an intrinsic nature of subjective being, fertile and generous.

In the 'Hymn to Adversity', Gray sees in sorrow one of the main sources of, or ways to, the renewing, creative power of



## THOMAS GRAY

poetry He personifies Adversity as a Goddess and says, addressing himself to her

The gen'rous spark extinct revive,  
Teach me to love and to forgive,

*Hymn to Adversity, 45*

The 'spark' of inspiration is depicted as *generous*, and a kinship with 'love' and 'forgiveness' seems to be implied in it Its moral value is, here also,<sup>1</sup> though vaguely, asserted But why is it generous, intrinsically and ultimately? Is it because it carries within itself, as I have often said or implied, its *uncaused* (not extrinsically caused), infinitely impersonal principle, felt as such?

I must point out a possible objection, though I merely mention the far-reaching problem it calls forth Why then, it may be objected, does not *effort* also carry within itself some sense of its utterly intrinsic and *eternal* cause? If there is anything original and potential, it is effort Effort, in fact, if it were entirely necessitated, would be an absurdity, or else a mere illusion Yet effort seems to possess the *infinite* of freedom, not, generally, that of freedom's primal and intrinsic character It clearly indicates that self-causality, however essential to any intimate value of universality, and, at least up to a certain point, explicative of it, is yet not sufficient to constitute it, unless through further qualifications

The pervasive and soothing and dominant power of poetry is expressed in the lines

Oh! Sovereign of the willing soul,  
Parent of sweet and solemn-breathing airs,  
Enchanting shell! the sullen Cares,  
And frantic Passions hear thy soft controul

*The Progress of Poesy, 13*

High in the summit of the living present lies this 'controul', which renews and restores life and sustains its burden Every passion is raised by art into a higher passion, less blinded in its objects and external, less exclusively belonging to one's separate self, instinct with the joyous *eternity* of the sensuously creative

<sup>1</sup> Cf Chapter II, § 4

## THOMAS GRAY

form But, above all, it is transformed in a moment of inward truth, in a moment infinitely true, and less one-sidedly true, it is brought closer to its ever-renewing source and to the wide and rich unity which is disclosed by this very renewal

If this element is 'untaught', 'generous', and serene, it is also, or may be, a decisive influence, a unique light in one's process of knowing, and in one's life's wayfaring The dead bards, as Gray images, are not entirely oblivious of this world of ours

hither oft a glance from high  
They send of tender sympathy  
To bless the place, where on their opening soul  
First the genuine ardor stole

*Ode for Music, 19*

In the following passage poetical inspiration is even more directly and explicitly described

Bright Rapture calls, and soaring, as she sings,  
Waves in the eye of Heav'n her many-colour'd wings  
*The Bard, 123*

It bears witness to itself, being both the giver and the gift, and reveals its nature especially as regards two elements It is at one and the same time 'Rapture' and material richness (cf 'her many-colour'd wings') It is far from *rapture* as conceived by many ascetic religions and philosophies, that despise the sensible form—from which however, I think, they draw their very concepts This essential element of rich material conditions, outside and in the brain, and of a multitudinous origin of the inspired thought in the sensible material, within one's field of sentience, is represented again by the image of the 'trembling strings' in the following lines

Awake, Aeolian lyre, awake,  
And give to rapture all thy trembling strings  
*The Progress of Poesy, 1*

Also the expression, 'The pomp and prodigality of Heav'n', and 'a luxury of light', in the 'Stanzas to Mr Bentley' (vv 20 and 24), may be referred to the same conception

## THOMAS GRAY

2 This character of poetical thought, opposite, antagonistic in a sense to, yet inseparable from 'Rapture', from actual infinity and even from 'Melancholy', is not only, in Gray's poems, explicitly indicated. For his Muse originates deeply and richly in the things themselves, is pregnant with them. At the same time he depicts every item of form, not in its finite particularity, but representing it in such a way as to convert it into a principle of activity and infinity, and indeed in a highly indetermined reality, in a kind of *virtuality*. This may be illustrated by the following passage, where he represents the flying 'insect youth' by saying

Yet hark, how thro' the peopled air  
The busy murmur glows!

*Ode on the Spring, 23*

A common character is disengaged (common to *murmuring* and *glowing*, cf. 'The busy murmur glows'), more elemental and indeterminate even than the murmuring and the glowing. The single insects are represented only by their being busy, their murmur, their glowing, and the image of the 'peopled air'. They are described again in the lines

Brush'd by the hand of rough Mischance,  
Or chill'd by age, their airy dance  
They leave, in dust to rest

*Id.*, 38

The secret of the *transparency* of the passage is again ontological. Thought seems to be refined, thinned, into its essential values and modes: inward active potency and infinity, objective endless multiplicity, joy and pride of form, infinite want (or resignation?) face to face with final rest and death. Yet something more of the spiritual essence is revealed. The 'airy dance' seems not sufficient to justify the alternate play. A deep sense of sadness and an all-comprehensive outlook of reality are in some way contained in this passage.

3 The soul's unanswered infinite demand is original and, I think, ultimately real, and is felt as such by the poet. Gray gives

## THOMAS GRAY

a strong form to it in the image of an almost tangible silence

And all the air a solemn stillness holds,

*Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard, 6*

This silence is religious, in a sense. Because its immediate, naked value seems, and at one and the same time does not seem, self-sufficient, self-explained. Its very actuality seems to rule out derivative and external causes for its explanation. On the other hand, its very immensity makes us suspicious and wondering. Its very weight seems to conceal, as it were, a superior power and value which we do not know, in the inmost core of being, or in the fabric of the universe.

A present unanswered infinity, a shadow of freedom itself, or else overwhelming it, is perhaps the chief note in Gray's few poems. He calls it 'Melancholy' (cf. *Ode for Music*, 27-34). It is forcibly expressed in the lines

The plowman homeward plods his weary way,

And leaves the world to darkness and to me

*Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard, 3*

In the first line everything speaks effort—wearv effort, and weariness. The very sound of the syllables is instinct with it. Also a feeling of the universality of effort is expressed, for (this may confirm or support such a feeling) effort is presumably to be found everywhere in living nature. Effort is comparatively formless. Almost its only form is *certainly*. It is all bent to its object, self-transcending, identified either with its effects or, on the other hand, with its quantity, intent upon transcending present feeling and quality. It has no rich content, no vast presentness, no memory or retention about itself. We guess it in howls, shrieks, yells of fighting animals, contrasted with the trill, the warbling of a bird. Its value is borrowed from its external ends, or is to be identified with some undisclosed motive-value which underlies effort (for instance, a feeling of responsibility). Simple effort—if, for example, I walk my 'weary way'—is neither selfish nor unselfish, and seems barren. Yet pragmatically and socially there is nothing more essential and deserving. And there is innocence and lowliness in its pride, and our poor humanity. What is relevant

## THOMAS GRAY

in the present connection, to sum up, is that there seems to be lacking in effort an independent life of form

The barrenness and isolatedness of effort constitute the revealed concepts and the reality which logically, intelligibly unite the first and second line quoted. Solitude merges into isolation. Darkness is the soul's only possession. Infinity is there only to enhance the poignancy of one's loneliness. The last contact has disappeared, and now we see how heavy is infinity, when we are not lost in, and renewed by, an echo, however dim, of form's self-active principle. Indeed, in so far as the world is left 'to darkness', there could be expressed in the verse a shade of sweet melancholy, but the following words, in the same line, strike a sadder note

By way of conclusion, and of confirmation of what I have likewise stated elsewhere, and would like to make more and more apparent, it is first of all because of the essential, radically ontological character of the truths in which Gray's life and mind are centred, that a ray of beauty shines in his rhymes, not easily forgotten

## Chapter 4

### WILLIAM COLLINS

1721-1759

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THE POEMS OF GRAY AND COLLINS *Oxford University Press*  
Third Edition Revised, 1937

If the concept of *simplicity* had been duly considered, a decisive step would have been made towards solving the main problem of aesthetics. Philosophers, though calling attention to it in certain respects, have overlooked it, especially, when dealing explicitly with labelled Aesthetics (unless with reference to external, 'formal' concepts of simplicity, e.g., of symmetry, of economy). So much so, that historians of aesthetics, so far as I know, have failed to trace and gather any precious thread of thought in this direction. But this very concept of simplicity has been expressed, and given full prominence to, by a poet, William Collins, in his 'Ode to Simplicity'. He says

Tho' Taste, tho' Genius bless,  
To some divine Excess,  
Faints the cold Work till Thou inspire the whole,  
What each, what all supply,  
May court, may charm, our Eye,  
Thou, only Thou can'st raise the meeting Soul!  
*Ode to Simplicity*, 43

Thought forms itself in and through a moment of infinite opening. Indeed this vitally potential moment cannot be absent in any subjective *unity* whatever.<sup>1</sup> But in its highest expressions,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Introduction*

## WILLIAM COLLINS

when thought originates in a richer objective multiplicity, and discovers itself, its deep identity, in and through its manifold conditions and sources—in the world of mental presentments—then a strong simplicity, instinct with *eternity*, is revealed, underlying and dominating the richness of forms

Simplicity means an indeed admirable implication of all in all Now (according to the conception which I am trying to vindicate) that which is 'implied' is not 'latent' in the world of conditions, waiting, as it were, for development, and in fact not real Neither does 'implied' mean 'inferentially implied' It means that the 'implied' something is felt in the present moment as intimately kindred with it, intelligible in it, both realized, in a measure, and infinitely realizable in and through it, contained in it *in essentia* It means that the present moment—the actually present power of renewal, itself one and manifold, intrinsically characterized—is made intenser and deeper and truer by the 'implied' something Thus the simply *possible* acts of self-sacrifice share in the nature and power of a moment of love, weigh on its present reality, are 'implied' or 'contained' in its ultimate and actual nature, even if they are not at all envisaged, provided they are not, as they cannot be, excluded

In what sense can 'Genius' and 'Taste' (in the lines quoted) be rightly distinguished from, and opposed to, simplicity? Chiefly, I think, inasmuch as simplicity more powerfully and in a higher degree disengages the *intrinsic*, the *primal* and the *eternal* character of self-activity It overshadows, not only the particular forms, but all simplicity and harmony of form in which this very character of simplicity is less powerfully dominant It is the supreme value, akin to love's, even one with it

Love, only Love her forceless Numbers mean

\* *Id*, 39

This also is literally true Only then we must renounce the more specific meaning of love and charity<sup>1</sup> The bringing together of love and simplicity is remarkably significant Firstly it confirms the fact that simplicity is conceived by the poet as possessing a positive, creative character, not 'formal', not static, not mechan-

<sup>1</sup> Cf Chapter I, § 18

## WILLIAM COLLINS

cal Secondly, it emphasizes in simplicity the effacement of self, and of all arbitrary and externally constructive will

In the Ode referred to, Simplicity is explicitly represented, though in no less lively and direct a way But it is in the Ode dedicated to 'pensive *eve*' that the self-sustaining deep radiance of simplicity is most happily embodied

Now teach me, *Maid* compos'd,  
To breath some soften'd Strain,  
Whose Numbers stealing thro' thy darkning Vale,  
May not unseemly with its Stillness suit,  
*Ode to Evening*, 15<sup>1</sup>

Simplicity is a value of infinity and purity, beyond all forms, as far as possible, whose only form is harmonious stillness, or silence It is indeterminacy (potentiality) as a self-sustaining primal character of form itself It is essentially all-pervasive The quoted lines elicit this and other characters of the utterly simple, as lying in the 'Strain' itself Such an immediate presence of the imponderable is rarely attained

<sup>1</sup> *Italics in the text*



## Chapter 5

### WILLIAM BLAKE

1757-1827

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POETRY AND PROSE OF WILLIAM BLAKE, edited by Geoffrey Keynes Complete in one volume *The Nonesuch Press, London*  
Fourth Edition Reprinted, 1941

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1 Though Blake is generally considered as a mystic, we do not, I think, find in his poetry and prose the distinctive characteristics of mysticism and especially—in closer connection with the present study—it seems to me that his poetical inspiration and realization *exclude* what is mystic in a restricted sense

I leave aside the praeternormal phenomena of vision and perhaps of audition, mentioned in his writings, and particularly the fact that parts of his longer poems were written, we may admit, in a condition verging on trance. Psychic powers, undoubtedly, do not constitute the central trait of mysticism

I leave aside, also, Blake's Symbolic Mysticism. Firstly Symbolic Mysticism, though generally found in the mystics, does not constitute the value and essence of their doctrine, it is, we may say, not mysticism. Secondly, *symbols*—in that which characteristically differentiates them from other means of expression—seem to me to be *unpoetical*. Poetic expression is a moment of life and truth, but symbols are stiffened things, with the superaddition of abstract conceptions, or references to extrinsic powers and causes, which are not fully realized, and lack the self-dependent, self-witnessing truth of *form*. We see sometimes in Blake's poetry *expression* overlapping in *symbols*. For instance

## WILLIAM BLAKE

For a Tear is an Intellectual thing,  
    '*I saw a Monk of Charlemaine*', 25

Every Tear from Every Eye  
Becomes a Babe in Eternity,  
    '*To see a World in a Grain of Sand*', 67

But certainly this is not Blake's real poetry. The concept expressed, or symbolized, in the lines quoted is, I suppose, the following. Every sorrow, more than any other reality of consciousness, more than prayer itself, goes on living in the Macro-cerebrum of the world, calling for love and pity and help, and communion, and atonement. As thought has not exhaustively its cause in the given conditions in which it originates, but bears in itself a perpetually initial principle of causality, we have no right to put a limit to its vitality. This, I think is true. But the symbolic expression seems to be there only to add an element of hardness, of violence, an overstretched and rigid, unconvincing form of presentment, and a mysterious and weird element, which, at its best, in my opinion, is only an inferior ingredient in poetry.

Now let us consider the central and distinctive feature of mysticism. Mysticism is characterized by a feeling of the infinite, conceived not only as an essential character of inner being in its transient realizations, but as a reality existing outside all single realizations, and in itself highly contradictory. For this reality is conceived, on the one hand, as fundamentally creative: it is a living unity, it is love, and value, and, most certainly, form and time, and, on the other hand, it is represented, or asserted, as formless, timeless, immobile, fixed. The inherent contradiction should baffle and defeat us in our very power of thinking, but it is not exactly so for the mystic. He gives the greatest prominence to the *unintelligible* character of the Divine Unity. His mental attitude is ethical and practical rather than cognitive.

Blake does not minimize intellectual powers, rather he is their avenger. He vindicates thought in its true and deepest meaning, as the fundamental reality, and essentially one with life—life being intimately intelligible in and through it. For instance, in his little poem 'The Fly', he compares a fly to himself, while

## WILLIAM BLAKE

referring to a common principle, which he calls 'thought' Compare the stanza

If thought is life  
And strength and breath,  
And the want  
Of thought is death,

*Little Fly*, 13

He identifies thought, as we may infer, with 'Poetic Genius', which is 'the first principle and all the others merely derivative' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p 186), and with Imagination, which, like 'poetic Genius', and like the *word*, is both spirit and body (cf *All Religions are One*, p 148, *The Laocoon Group*, p 380, 'The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination', *Milton*, II, 35, p 418 'The Imagination is not a State it is the Human Existence itself', cf also, e g , pp 818, 820, 926) Indeed imagination is highly representative of, and may stand for, the active principle in its original values and forms<sup>1</sup> If it be duly considered in its fundamental meaning and nature, imagination must be identified with the principle of thought itself, and not regarded as merely one of its particular forms

Blake minimizes the abstractly objective moment of thought (cf the passages 'Abstract Philosophy warring in enmity against Imagination . . .', *Jerusalem*, I, p. 5, 437, and 'An Abstract objecting power that Negatives every thing', *Id* , I, 10, p 442) But these statements are simply in accordance with all reasonable thinking, for this abstractly objective moment of thought has only a secondary place in mental life and in theoretical thought itself Blake is far, as far as one could possibly be, from emphasizing, with the mystics, the unintelligible or irrational character of reality

Moreover, all secondary mystic, or quasi-mystic, elements which we may seem to discover in Blake's temperament, the complexities and strangeness of subliminal workings, a certain kind of crudity and violence, and overstretched and over-emphasized generalizations, disappear, in his verse, at the first call

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV, § 41

## WILLIAM BLAKE

of the Muses, they are, as it were, swept away by the wind of poetry

2 The poem to Spring is, we may say, a daring personification at the same time of spring and of spirit, an embodiment of spirit in the shape of spring. For expectancy, and the impassioned and humble, deep longing for the spring, birth of light and of the world of forms, song in its vast presentness and innumerable sources, the power of materializing the figure even to extreme details (cf 'locks', 'garments', 'feet'), without these being cut off from the unity and fullness of the image itself, form-in-the-making in its twofold power of joyous actualization, and of *infinity* exceeding any determined form, endlessly vast transparencies, humility (cf v 8), and, deeper than any desire for the spring, and prior to it, the intimately and universally active longing for form—these and other radical aspects of the mental synthesis—of its most creative moment—are expressed in the few lines

O thou with dewy locks, who lookest down  
Thro' the clear windows of the morning, turn  
Thine angel eyes upon our western isle,  
Which in full choir hails thy approach, O Spring!

The hills tell each other, and the list'ning  
Vallies hear, all our longing eyes are turned  
Up to thy bright pavillions issue forth,  
And let thy holy feet visit our clime

Come o'er the eastern hills, and let our winds  
Kiss thy perfumed garments, let us taste  
Thy morn and evening breath, scatter thy pearls  
Upon our love-sick land that mourns for thee

To endeavour to translate *beauty* in my poor words would be foolish, and here I wish only to call attention to a minor detail. The more a noun, in the preceding lines, is determined and objectively limited, the more the adjective which accompanies it is

## WILLIAM BLAKE

possessed of a character of wide and actually felt possibility of realization, i.e., a character of actual infinity (cf 'dewy locks', 'perfumed garments', 'holy feet') Or when, on the other hand, it is not accompanied and transformed in the verse by any adjective, we find that it is a highly indeterminate name, highly comprehensive, a key to the many, capable of unlimited qualifications (cf 'approach', 'clime') Indeed the 'hills' may seem to form an exception, but they 'tell each other', sharing in the multitudinous source of the song, extending the living present—one's span of consciousness—to remoter limits, tissuing, as it were, the web of thought

The personification shows nothing fictitious or rhetorical, because there is in it an original and perpetual substance, an ever-living reality, of which it is born and which justifies it The poet does not write while seeking for a moment of naive imagination, or indulging in it, but in a moment of vigilant truth, believing, and rightly believing, that what he says is ultimately real—either located in the objects, or in *eternity*, that is, in the intrinsic nature of thought For the poem expresses not only the awakening of the spring, but, identically, the birth of spirit, in which given historical conditions and strictly 'existential' truth become even less prominent

But pride of form, as compared or contrasted with its first blissful delicate touch, is more forcibly expressed, as it had to be, in the lines to Summer

on  
Some bank beside a river clear, throw thy  
Silk draperies off, and rush into the stream  
Our vallies love the Summer in his pride  
*To Summer 'O thou, who passest*

The moment, again, of the first disclosing, the all-powerful, all-pervasive moment of form in its *potency*, is referred to, let us say, as the thing, greater and higher than which nothing can be thought, in the lines

My lord was like the opening eyes of day,  
When western winds creep softly o'er the flowers,  
*Fair Elenor 'The bell struck one*

## WILLIAM BLAKE

In the short poem 'Memory' the deep essential character of the *spontaneous* arising of memories, and, more generally, of contemplation, is depicted

Memory, hither come,  
And tune your merry notes,  
And, while upon the wind  
Your music floats,  
I'll pore upon the stream,  
*'Memory, hither come'*

The subtle value is here expressed both of the unbidden, self-dependent, perpetual origin of thought—the ever fresh joy in self-revealing forms—and of Melancholy—infinite intimate demand never fulfilled ('Melancholy' is explicitly mentioned in the second stanza of the poem, not given here) The kinship between this joy, and melancholy, and a deeply felt value of eternity, lies in the very nature of creative freedom or, in other words, of formative thought, and it is, in these quoted lines, reached and revealed A E Housman, in his essay *The Name and Nature of Poetry*<sup>1</sup>, seems to say that the little poem is beautiful, just because there is no thought in it He quotes the whole first stanza and adds 'That answers to nothing real, memory's merry notes and the rest are empty phrases, not things to be imagined, the stanza does but entangle the reader in a net of thoughtless delight' Here Housman yields to the common prejudice, or shallow and false view, according to which *that* is 'thought', which is really what is cheapest in thought!

The unsought memories appear also frequently to be *self-purposive*—with no extrinsic end, and not necessitated by an external cause That also adds to their spiritual lightness and full presentness of value Inspiration shares in this character And the poem to the Muses, which is a kind of Invocation, represents the Muses through this quality—through a value of inward purposiveness and of present, actual infinitude, the ontological nature of which I have endeavoured to investigate on more than one occasion

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge University Press, 1938, pp 42, 43

## WILLIAM BLAKE

Whether in Heav'n ye wander fair,  
Or the green corners of the earth,  
Or the blue regions of the air,  
Where the melodious winds have birth,

Whether on chrystal rocks ye rove,  
Beneath the bosom of the sea  
Wand'ring in many a coral grove,  
Fair Nine, forsaking Poetry<sup>1</sup>

How have you left the antient love,  
*To the Muses 'Whether on Ida's shady brow'*

The poet thinks that the Muses are not dead, they wander somewhere, though forsaking poetry. In fact their spirit is essentially one and the same thing with the all-original cause of form and the very principle of love. It would be preposterous to assume that—in any time and country whatever—they are definitely dead. Then we are confronted with this arduous problem. How can the essentially original flame cease to be? The very purity of its perpetual novelty—its non-derived and non-composite character, its not being entirely constituted by given conditions and dependent on them—seems to be a token of the factual eternity of its principle. Hence we strongly feel that if the Muses do not visit us, it must be for second causes, let us say, accidentally. We can appeal to them, something can be awakened in the most delicate seed, where nature is uncorrupted, most purely *potential* and free and in the making.

✓<sub>3</sub> An acute and most peculiar contribution of Blake to elicit, to render more explicit, one's consciousness of there being an original element in subjective reality, has a close connection with the problem of evil. He says that the principle ('the soul') of form is incorruptible, that there is an inviolable purity and innocence in the positive, most real element of creative novelty.

The soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd  
*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p. 184<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also *America*, p. 204, *Auguries of Innocence*, lines 61, 62, p. 119

## WILLIAM BLAKE

This spirit of delight, this joy, cannot be intimately affected by extrinsic causes. Moreover, it 'can never pass away' (*Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, p. 194). It is possessed of a cosmic significance. It contains a value of infinity and universality—even when the particular subject does not subordinate itself to self-transcending aims. It overshadows evil, in some way, and seems to show that that which is most surely real and fundamental is good.

Blake does not say that evil does not exist. This crude and, I think, false statement is found sometimes in descriptive philosophy, but could hardly find place in cognitive-poetical reality. Besides seeing evil, in a sense, in what may be described as a lesser good, besides seeing it in the horrible suffering and destruction of which the good of one living being is the direct or indirect cause as regards other living beings (and in this thought he finds no peace and tries desperately to reconcile the fact with his religious faith), Blake sees positive evil when the deepening of one's consciousness could possibly avoid it, that is to say, in *bad will*. He sees it first of all in the cruelty of the political and social Hydra.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear  
                  '*I wander thro' each charter'd street*'

He sees evil in the utilitarian spirit, in conformity with which joy is made either an *end* or a *means*, and is no more a *motive-value*.

He who bends to himself a joy  
Does the winged life destroy,  
But he who kisses the joy as it flies  
Lives in eternity's sun rise

*Eternity*<sup>1</sup>

Let us quote in this connection the following passage, where fundamentally the same point of view is vindicated. *Value* is

<sup>1</sup> I have partially followed in this quotation the Oxford University Press Edition (first published 1913) which in the first line reads 'bends' instead of 'binds'.



## WILLIAM BLAKE

represented as intrinsically purposive, self-dependent, non-utilitarian

The Angel that presided o'er my birth  
Said, 'Little creature, form'd of Joy and Mirth,  
Go, love without the help of any Thing on Earth'  
*'The Angel that presided o'er my birth'*

Love must live by its own power and for its own sake, without thought of reward and without any external support whatever

He sees evil, again, in the meanness of small, poor satisfactions, ambitiously sought for

These are the tricks of the world, but the pure soul  
Shall mount on native wings, disdaining  
Little sport,

*King Edward the Third, p 33*

He sees positively moral evil in the moment of form in its exclusiveness, verging on the form *qua* formed, or at least this concept seems to be adequately expressed by the words he uses on one occasion 'unprolific, self-clos'd, all-repelling' (*The First Book of Urizen*, p 220) Yet even in 'pride of Selfhood'<sup>1</sup> a grain of goodness must be found, for, as it is frequently stated, 'everything that lives is holy' <sup>2</sup> Moreover, 'pride of Selfhood' is a 'Contrary', I suppose, and 'Without Contraries is no progression' <sup>3</sup> Blake even says, 'all Act is Virtue' <sup>4</sup> Most obviously, however, both in his poems and in his prose writings, he does not claim to go beyond good and evil, except as regards given forms of them, he does not fall into Energetism—which (I maintain) is the denial of the spirit's deeper nature

He utterly abhors life becoming 'opaque', 'unexpansive', 'petrified' <sup>5</sup> What he most decidedly and most constantly condemns is

<sup>1</sup> Cf, for example, pp 488, 506

<sup>2</sup> *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p 193, *America*, p 204, *Jerusalem*, III, p 526, *Annotations to Lavater's Aphorisms*, No 309, p 717

<sup>3</sup> *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p 181

<sup>4</sup> *Annotations to Lavater's Aphorisms*, No 640, p 735

<sup>5</sup> Cf, for example, pp 292, 385, 532, 294, 216, 291 Cf also *The First Book of Urizen*, II, 4, p 221, *The Book of Los*, I, 10, p 243

## WILLIAM BLAKE

the abstract intellect swaying outside its own competence, i.e., the False Reason,<sup>1</sup> which denies everything living

Malignity itself seems to be represented as an ultimate and highly *potential* cause in the image

Like a fiend hid in a cloud  
'My mother groan'd! my father wept'

But Blake's dominant idea is that the fundamental reality shares the nature of light and love even in things abject and cruel. In the poem 'The Sick Rose', the destructive 'worm' is depicted by its 'dark secret love', which intrudes in an infinitude of joy, enhanced in and through the *infinite* of its more visible quality (cf. 'crimson'). The perpetual tragedy in nature's womb is contained in the little poem

O Rose, thou art sick!  
The invisible worm  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm,  
  
Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy,  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy  
                                  'O Rose, thou art sick!'

Ultimately *bright* is the tiger.

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?  
                                  *The Tyger*

The word 'symmetry' (let us confine ourselves to this detail) is related both to the physiological and the mental, and, as it were, bridges over them. If in the place of 'symmetry' we had other

<sup>1</sup> 'False Reason', cf. J. Middleton Murry, *William Blake*, 1933, Blake himself generally says, 'Reasoning Power', also 'Abstract Power', 'Abstraction'. Cf. above, § 1, *Jerusalem*, III, p. 533.

## WILLIAM BLAKE

words, such as 'mechanism', or 'organism', or 'frame', the poem would have been left comparatively deficient both as regards beauty and truth. Symmetry, akin in some respects to the word 'synthesis', succeeds in eliciting an original value of embodied potency and of *unity-in-the-many*.

Blake does not deny the ultimate reality of evil as suffering, nor of the moral evil—or bad will. *Bad will* may be conceived as a lack of comprehension and charity, wherever we think that such comprehension or such charity *might* be awakened. Blake does not face the problem, in what sense this bad will is intimately and actively real *as bad*. If he sometimes seems inclined to identify bad will with 'Negation', and 'Negation' with 'Non-entity', this rather sweeping conception is not definitely stated. But what he says is, I think, simple and true. Every quality of things is self-active, self-purposive. It shares the intrinsic nature of subjectivity. It is spirit, or—if we like to use this word only to describe spirit's highest developments—it cannot but partake of spirit's most radical character. It may lose this character only in so far as it is, to a certain extent, bereft of itself. Indeed this is what in ordinary life most frequently occurs, inasmuch as a given quality is entirely subordinated to its objective conditions—for which, from a practical point of view, it generally stands.

The following sentence is, in this connection, especially significant. Blake says 'Each thing is its own cause and its own effect' (*Annotations to Lavater's 'Aphorisms on Man'*, at the end, p. 735). Apart from the crudity of the statement (which leaves aside external causality—causality as it is generally understood), the truth which, we may assume, suggests and justifies the above quoted words, and which is vividly expressed by them, is this. Each thing—either in its own life, if it is a living being, or in its qualities, *qua* perceived or sensed—is spiritual. It is fundamentally self-active and self-purposive. It is at one and the same time its own end (intrinsic end) and its own cause. Hence it is possessed with the self-transcendent value of a highly formative principle, of an essentially mental principle of immanent *perfection* (in the Aristotelian active sense of the word). And it bears in its active element something innocent, self-transcendent, purifying. The proposition just quoted may be regarded as laying bare, in one

## WILLIAM BLAKE

of its most radical aspects, a concept which is alive all through Blake's poetry. It is the concept of an original and essentially generous character of reality. It is Blake's imperishable message of joy.

It is above all in the joy of children that he sees this original, eternal and untaught element

When the voices of children are heard on the green  
And laughing is heard on the hill,  
My heart is at rest within my breast  
And everything else is still

*Nurse's Song, in Songs of Innocence*

4 This inmost joy, unconquerable, creative, is certainly one with Blake's acute sense of actualization or form as an original force. Indeed the vivid notion of this principle is the source of so many vigorously expressed truths in his prose, and particularly those concerned with a 'self-derived'<sup>1</sup> seed and intrinsic criterion of truth itself. But, on the other hand, the same undaunted and serene joy is evolved and refined through suffering and renunciation. Blake himself says 'Understanding or Heaven is acquir'd by means of Suffering & Distress & Experience'<sup>2</sup>. Indeed his own intimate experience in this connection is but seldom explicit in his works. But a solitary deep note is struck in the lines

Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none  
come to buy,  
And in the wither'd field where the farmer plows  
for bread in vain

*Vala, or the Four Zoas, II, p. 278*

<sup>1</sup> Page 742, *Annotations to Swedenborg's Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (p. 233)

<sup>2</sup> Page 736, *Id.*, p. r

## Chapter 6

### WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

1770-1850

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THE POETICAL WORKS OF WORDSWORTH *Oxford University Press* Reprinted 1936

1 There is more difference between a flower and a piece of mechanism, let us say a watch, than between a man and a flower. This idea is implied—and its full significance is elicited—in the following passage

How does the Meadow-flower its bloom unfold?  
Because the lovely little flower is free  
Down to its root, and, in that freedom, bold,  
And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree  
Comes not by casting in a formal mould,  
But from its *own* divine vitality  
‘“*A Poet*!”—*He hath put his heart to school*’, 9<sup>1</sup>

There is in a flower, and in all living processes—as, it seems to me, we must suppose—an original motive-value of actualization, which is really a cause in their development. The word ‘bold’, in the lines quoted, happily elicits it. We may also call this highly original value ‘determination’, yet it is a determination which implies indeterminacy—freedom—as an element in its very reality and strength.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, determination is the stronger in proportion to its immediately implied indeterminacy.

On the other hand indeterminacy, as an aspect of freedom—

<sup>1</sup> *Italics* in the text

<sup>2</sup> Cf. my work *Il concetto dell'indeterminazione*, § 56

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

that is to say, as a reality of potency, in which the many-in-one and a value of present infinity are conceivable—can be understood only as a moment of consciousness, of thought, of sentiency, as a value, as a feeling. Hence the very concept of self-activity supposes in all living processes, however humble, a principle of sentiency. Wordsworth does not shrink from admitting sentiency in vegetable life.

And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes.

*Lines Written in Early Spring, 11*

Spontaneity as opposed to mechanism is an outstanding motive-value throughout Wordsworth's poetry. I use the word 'mechanism' in a wide sense, as another name for a process entirely ruled by relations of external conditionality or, even more generally, by strict, rigorous necessity. Philosophers have often tried to maintain an absolute necessity which is not mechanism—which even has an idealistic hue, and admits of intimate purposiveness. But they have failed, in my opinion, to make such a conception convincing. It must be also recalled, in this connection, that the concept of fortuitousness (of indeterminacy *qua* fortuitousness) would still belong to the world of mere objective existence and not to that of subjectivity.

2 Let us consider this spontaneity straight away in its highest and most explicit form. Its inner principle is described in the following passage:

such delight I found  
To note in shrub and tree, in stone and flower,  
That intermixture of delicious hues,  
Along so vast a surface, all at once,  
In one impression, *by connecting force*  
*Of their own beauty*, imaged in the heart

*To Joanna, 45*

All items of vision absorb each other by the 'connecting force of their own beauty'. The principle of synthesis is not abstractly inferred, it is 'beauty', it is 'force'. It is a reality of experience. It

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

is at one and the same time a phenomenal and an ontological reality. It is an original power, intrinsically characterized, revealing its intrinsic necessity, its primal and *eternal* character, while absorbing the manifold and realizing itself in and through it.

Form and sense are not an obstacle to the knowledge of that very moment of self-activity which exceeds objective multiplicity and, in some respects, form itself. They are an obstacle if they abide, but not in the 'flash' of their transiency—in which alone this very moment is known and in which alone it may be intelligibly conceived. The following lines may be interpreted as standing either for an immanent or for a transcendent explanation regarding its possible abode:

in such strength  
Of usurpation, when the light of sense  
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed  
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,  
*The Prelude*, VI, 599

The allusion to a higher and entirely different reality—as compared with that of life and sense—is undoubtedly strong here. Yet it seems to me that in whatever belongs to a less inferential and hypothetical thought and which most surely belongs to the poetical-cognitive value of the lines here quoted, 'the light of sense' and, on the other hand, 'greatness' and the 'strength of usurpation' represent, and are meant to represent, one and the same reality. The 'strength of usurpation' depicts that active death, which is, first of all, birth, renewal. Ecstasy reveals the very principle of synthesis.

The idea of a 'purer' or a 'deeper birth' is again that of the synthesis, as we know it directly, not inferentially, in experience:

The outward shows of sky and earth,  
Of hill and valley, he has viewed,  
*And impulses of deeper birth*  
Have come to him in solitude  
*A Poet's Epitaph*, 45

For, ever as a thought of purer birth  
*The Prelude*, V, 332

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

The following lines express essential aspects of original indeterminacy obliviousness of the past, of all forms *qua* formed, plasticity and comprehensiveness and vigilant, ready renewal in all the vast field of sentience

Up the brook  
I roamed in the confusion of my heart,  
Alive to all things and forgetting all  
‘*It was an April morning fresh and clear*’, 17

The concept of an ‘active principle’—in its full significance, that belongs to the general history of philosophy and culture—is directly and explicitly referred to in the following passages

. . . yet we . . .  
. . . pertain full surely  
To a chilled age, most pitiable shut out  
From that which is and actuates,  
*Musings near Aquapendente*, 323, 325 <sup>1</sup>

that which moves with light and life informed,  
Actual, divine, and true

*The Prelude*, XIV, 161

‘That which is and actuates’ could also be interpreted according to the so-called philosophy of ‘being’—as opposed to that of ‘becoming’ ‘that which previously (logically, genetically, or temporally) exists and then actuates’ It seems to me that the above expression, in this sense, would not be justified

The active principle is represented in the lines quoted as that which we know, or may know, intimately, and not only inferentially and abstractly However, quite an opposite view is pointed out in another passage as possibly true

An *active* Principle —howe’er removed  
From sense and observation,  
*The Excursion*, IX, 3 <sup>2</sup>

I surmise that in this passage Wordsworth yields to the authority

<sup>1</sup> *Italics* in the text

<sup>2</sup> *Italics* in the text



## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

of a stern philosophy, which, while constantly missing *subjectivity*—yet feeling, strongly and deeply, its metaphysical requirement—builds up an alarming framework around it and in its place. And perhaps it is significant that this passage does not possess a remarkable poetical value and we may plausibly ascribe it to Wordsworth's prosaic, rather than to his poetical, thought.

But, no doubt, Wordsworth was himself convinced of the presence and knowableness of the active principle, both of its inward richness and its *simplicity*, in experience and in sensation or—to use his own words—in 'creative sensibility' (*The Prelude*, II, 360). This was in fact his dominant thought.

Therefore am I still  
A lover of all the mighty world  
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,  
And what perceive, well pleased to recognise  
In nature and the language of the sense  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being

*Tintern Abbey*, 102, 105

The thought here expressed has hardly anything to do with sensationalism, according to the general acceptance of the word. Wordsworth does not derive mind from sensations, rather, *he sees mind in sensation*.<sup>1</sup>

He conceives reason as a (spiritually) concrete reality, it is but a higher passion (cf. *The Prelude*, V, 40). Its *objectivity* is in fact, above all, self-transcendence, the value and power of thought's wide, limitless identification with reality, it does not fundamentally depend on an abstracting and calculating process. Reason's highest name is *imagination*.

Imagination, which, in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And Reason in her most exalted mood

*The Prelude*, XIV, 189<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also *The Prelude*, I, 551, *The Excursion*, III, 842

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chapter XV, § 41

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

The view according to which only that exists which can be divided into constituent parts for the purpose of analysis, cannot be true Wordsworth above all dislikes our obdurate blindness towards that which we know best—yet to which we do not pay attention, perhaps because it is too simple and because it does not keep busy the objectifying abstract intellect, our proud voluntary thought,

that false secondary power  
By which we multiply distinctions,

*Id*, II, 216

Cf also *Musings near Aquapendente*, 326-30 'We murder to dissect', he says (*The Tables Turned*, 28) He stigmatizes the outwardly turned mind, 'that loathes or slights' feeling (*To the Lady Fleming*, 53)

He opposes the view according to which, through a false concept—indeed, through the lack of any concept whatever—of subjectivity, 'the human soul' is conceived as if it were

of a thousand faculties composed  
And twice ten thousand interests,

*The Excursion*, IV, 988

3 The preceding passages express a non-abstract conception of subjectivity, the principle of which is neither sought in the complexities of organized objective existents, nor inferentially asserted as something unattainable in experience The principle of subjectivity is found in fact in a value of present infinity, supremely real This conception is forcibly and searchingly expressed in the following lines

Our destiny, our being's heart and home,  
Is with infinitude, and only there,  
With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
Effort, and expectation, and desire,  
And something evermore about to be

*The Prelude*, VI, 604

The concept of infinity is generally investigated by philosophers with reference to its meaning in a series of finite objective exist-

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

ents, either from an elementary, or from a highly developed, mathematical point of view. Similarly, the concept of possibility, in its subjective reality, is generally overlooked, it is defined by reference to actually objective existents, these only being conceived as real. No suspicion arises that the tremendous and all-fecund feeling of the *possible* may deserve to be seriously examined as possessing an unborrowed reality. From a far less biased, less one-sided point of view, the poet shows the *potential* moment—this actual infinity, this deeper aspect of freedom—as a non-provisional reality. It certainly cannot be known *objectively* or in distinct items. Nevertheless it is known most closely, it is the only thing we really know, it is that in which we have 'our being's heart and home'.

In a poem presumably composed in 1786, when Wordsworth was sixteen years old, the feeling of infinity already finds perfect expression

Dark is the ground, a slumber seems to steal  
O'er vale, and mountain, and the starless sky  
Now, in this blank of things, a harmony,  
Home-felt, and home-created, comes to heal  
That grief

'Calm is all nature, ', 5

He is always watchful of an all-pervading, powerful, present infinity, seizing it, as it were, depicting it as an actual reality of great, unique significance. Walking upon a hill in the Scottish Highlands, he hears a girl singing, a solitary reaper

'Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang  
As if her song could have no ending,

*The Solitary Reaper*, 25

The following poetical image is also a philosophical proposition

Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,  
And shares the nature of infinity

*The Borderers*, III, 1543

Compare, in this connection, Chapters VIII, §9, XV, § 17

Sorrow may awake the consciousness of a deeper infinitude

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

while forcing us to renounce, and while detaching us from, the brilliant world of forms. This moment of self-renunciation, in the blank of things, to use the poet's words, may be that of a deep renewal and conversion. And it may constitute a moment of wider truth, more comprehensible, and charitable, and searching, than even the all-penetrative moment of form in its first luminous, boundless indeterminacy and springtime opening. It is in these or like thoughts that the poet says that, 'through a world of death', Nature breathes into man

a second breath,  
More searching than the breath of spring.

*Peter Bell, 1074*

Infinitude lurks in the radiance of forms and in the very apex of joy as a primal longing for form and value, never satisfied, as a boundless requirement of the ethical soul, laden with the sorrow of numberless lives and seeking a justification for it. The infinite immanent value and beauty of transient forms, of little flowers blooming, is apt to awake the thought of an inward hopeless tragedy—a contradiction in the spirit itself, the thought of an immense creative destiny which no immanence of value in any of its creations can satisfy. It is perhaps this feeling—unless it is simply the bewilderment and joyous commotion which beauty, like love, can rouse, while destroying in ourselves our accustomed, habitual world and our formed self—that is expressed in the lines

To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears

• *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood, 206*

But the darker aspect of the spirit-indwelling tragedy is certainly reflected in the passage

So that a doubt almost within me springs  
Of Providence, such emptiness at length  
Seems at the heart of all things

*'When, looking on the present face of things', 8*

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

4 Is value represented in Wordsworth's poetry as suggesting an immanent or a transcendent explanation, concerning its ultimate nature and origin? A transcendent explanation of value may be understood in two quite different ways. Value may be represented as being inspired by superior Powers. Yet these Powers, in this view, may be conceived as being born of the same spiritual essence, as being made of the same stuff, as realizing—though in higher forms—the same beauty, or love, which we know in our plane of life. I would call this a 'relatively transcendent' interpretation of value, though, fundamentally, it would still be a radically immanent interpretation. For, from the point of view of the nature of value, it matters little whether its highest expressions are to be found in men, or whether there are, in the great process of earthly and non-earthly evolution, higher forms of intelligence. These would still, in this view, share in the nature of value and form and time, and be dependent, even if they are immortal, on their perpetual renewal and development. They would still be forms of that spiritual essence which is given us to investigate. Whereas according to an absolutely transcendent view, value is asserted as being originated by something which is itself formless and timeless—and yet spiritual, which creates value's and time's very principle, though in a non-intelligible way. Value, by its very nature perpetually creative, would be originated by an all-powerful Unity, or Simultaneity, containing time, as it were, cherishing it, yet nullifying it. 'Immanent', on the other hand, or 'immanent', I call that conception which interprets or tends to interpret value as present, active, self-caused, self-purposive, self-justified—and not derived from causes, either material, or divine, which are heterogeneous with it. Here I wish only to quote some characteristic passages, which point to either one or the other of these interpretations as the first cause of value.

In the following passages, for instance, no doubt seems to arise about value—namely, in these lines, *love*, as we know it in our earthly experience—as being sufficient to explain itself. It is even represented, in the first passage, as mightier than the Gods of Olympus, and self-dependent. It is Laodamia speaking

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

The Gods to us are merciful—and they  
Yet further may relent, for mightier far  
Than strength of nerve and sinew, or the sway  
Of magic potent over sun and star,  
Is love, though oft to agony distrest,  
And though his favourite seat be feeble woman's breast  
*Laodamia, 85*

Love's passion is depicted through its essentials in the following lines

He flew to her from whom they would divide him—  
He clove to her who could not give him peace—  
*Vaudracour and Julia, 154*

These are characteristic aspects of love, namely, the urge for an identity—which tolerates no limit—with another living being, and love's value as something which is far above peace and happiness. They strictly belong to, and are (up to a certain point at least) intelligible in, the intrinsic nature of the mental synthesis. Obviously there is no feeling here expressed of any necessity of explaining them upon any ground other than love itself.

In the poem 'Resolution and Independence', Wordsworth beautifully describes sunrise after a tempestuous night, his joyous and exalted thoughts lead him to remember highly inspired poets, and eventually he says

By our own spirits are we deified  
*Resolution and Independence, 47*

The following passage, again, testifies to an immanent, rather than to a transcendent, interpretation as regards the nature and origin of value

that blessed mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened —that serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on,—  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things

*Tintern Abbey, 37*

On the other hand, a transcendent first cause of value (whether *relatively* or *absolutely* transcendent, is not apparent) is pointed out in the following extracts

Well may our hearts have faith that blessings come,  
Streaming from founts above the starry sky,

*The Cuckoo-Clock, 38*

But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home

*Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood, 64.*

Thine is the tranquil hour, purpureal Eve!  
But ne'er can I believe  
That this magnificence is wholly thine!

An intermingling of Heaven's pomp is spread  
On ground which British shepherds tread!  
'Had this effulgence disappeared', 33, 35, 39.

Compare also *The Widow of Windermere Side, 38*

Other passages can be variously interpreted. When Wordsworth speaks of 'heaven-descended Piety and Song' (*Canute, 14*), or in the dedicatory lines, in which he addresses himself to the Poet, and which begin 'If thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven', this word 'Heaven' may be interpreted simply as the fittest, sometimes the only adequate word, to depict the deep intrinsic character of the formative principle itself, and its inherent, perpetually self- and form-transcending value

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Urania, I shall need  
Thy guidance,  
For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink  
Deep—and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds  
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil  
*The Excursion Preface, 25, 28*

Again this may be meant to be no more—and no less—than the  
world of subjectivity  
In his poem 'On the Power of Sound', he asks

Point not these mysteries to an Art  
Lodged above the starry pole,  
Pure modulations flowing from the heart  
Of divine Love, where Wisdom, Beauty, Truth  
With Order dwell, in endless youth?  
*On the Power of Sound, 108*

A transcendent origin of value is certainly suggested. Yet, were it not for the second line quoted, the passage could be understood as depicting or defining the creative essence in its highest value and development 'Order' may stand, either for a relation of external conditionality, or for a value of subordination and sharp transcendency of the actual, or, again, for that same harmony, that unity of intrinsically related values, which is the very source and substance of 'Wisdom' as well, and of 'Beauty' The 'endless youth' especially implies creativeness, and would hardly fit in, I think, with the concept of timelessness, and of an absolutely transcendent Deity

- O Silence! are Man's noisy years  
No more than moments of thy life?  
*Id, 217*

The 'life' of 'silence' could be but an aspect of value as conceived in its immanent nature The image may really be born of, and substantiate, the very limit-concept of formlessness indeterminacy *felt* as lying above realization, the potential and primal character of freedom *felt* as eclipsing all its form and causes This



## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

would not imply a transcendent view, much less an 'absolutely' transcendent view. But the latter is visibly reflected in another passage, in which the same image occurs. Wordsworth speaks of 'shadowy recollections', which

have power to make  
Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal Silence truths that wake,  
To perish never

Intimations , 157

I refer especially to the last words, in which we seem to recognize the idea of a pre-eminently *abiding*, *static* (if we can use this word concerning what is stated to be spiritual, non-material) and transcendentially existing reality.

All explanation of value as *derivative* in a materialistic sense—all explanation of value through mere objective existents, i.e., through matter (conceived as in itself bereft of subjectivity)—is, implicitly, discarded. But to the question: Do we need to look for a first cause of value in a reality intrinsically different from it? we find no answer, or beginning of answer, in the preceding passages. We may only remark that what points more especially to an 'absolutely' transcendent explanation appears to be more *constructed* and belongs less to poetical-cognitive thought. On the other hand, it is clear that Wordsworth is not always satisfied with an immanent explanation.

5 From a more general point of view, however, we may say that Wordsworth—though he vindicates 'the connecting force of beauty' and our moral nature as realities essentially, fundamentally known in experience and sense—is not the poet of immanence. For, in fact, he always *bends* (to adopt Blake's image) value to something else, either to self, or to some general interest, and thereby bereaves it—or tends to bereave it—of its infinity and power. Indeed he looks for it, he cherishes it. But this is just what value is impatient of. Value must be self-originating, self-imposing, it must absorb the particular self without residuum, otherwise it is made an *object*, a thing of enjoyment, a thing of

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

utility, and this is incompatible with its nature. But the *self* is always present in Wordsworth's poetry, however subordinated to unselfish interests. Most certainly I exaggerate yet this, to a certain extent, is true, and must be recognized, and discounted, if we are to listen wholeheartedly to the call of Wordsworth's poetry and to vindicate through his word the riches and holiness of the spirit.

6 Wordsworth himself longs for a fuller presence of the generous impulse, for that perfect grace, in which love is 'an unerring light', and he sighs for it, with regret compare the 'Ode to Duty', where, addressing himself to Duty, he says

There are who ask not if thine eye  
Be on them, who, in love and truth,  
Where no misgiving is, rely  
Upon the genial sense of youth

*Ode to Duty*, 9

It is, however, in duty's stern value-transcending effort that we may sometimes see—rarely, fleetingly—*immanent* value in its highest and purest light. Still addressing himself to Duty, he says

Nor know we anything so fair  
As is the smile upon thy face .

*Id* , 43

With no less delicate touch he depicts self-renunciation, the human being who is effaced (and exalted) by it

for she *lives*, the meek,  
The self-restraining, and the ever-kind,  
*Written after the Death of Charles Lamb*, 80<sup>1</sup>

7 Accents of genuine poetry, again, we find in Wordsworth as a poet of history. This is perhaps not unrelated with the same twofold (sometimes conflicting) attitude for, indeed, he is the poet of subjectivity and yet a strong believer in the *objects* in and for themselves, his interest in essential truths does not seem to

<sup>1</sup> *Italics in the text.*

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

overshadow his interest in facts He speaks of the beginning of the French Revolution

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
*The Prelude*, XI, 108

It was as if nature were  
standing on the brink  
Of some great trial,  
*Id*, IX, 398

Compare *Id*, VI, 340, IX, 284, 383, XI, 117, XIV, 435

<sup>8</sup> In the Ode 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', we find Wordsworth's great discovery of the *actual cause*—his most radical, though only implied, assertion of an original and intrinsically characterized nature of subjective being There are men, blinded, I think, by their pride, who probably have never paid attention to children, and maintain that all moral consciousness in them is brought about by education This is not the view of the poet He addresses himself to the child and says

Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!  
On whom those truths do rest,  
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,

Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might  
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,

Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,  
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,  
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

*Intimations* . . , f14, 125, 130

Reference to that which I call 'original causality', and to its related values and aspects, is by no means unmixed in the poem Sometimes it seems that the Wisdom, *which is not hidden from little children*, is referred to, or derived from, a transcendent Reality, God, and thus in some way explained Sometimes it is obviously referred to pre-natal experience

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Interpreting this Ode, W R Inge discards the reincarnationist explanation, whether in itself or as adopted by Wordsworth. He thinks that we must interpret the poet's words as pointing to a 'racial' explanation of that which Wordsworth admires in children. He says 'The subject is one of surpassing interest, because modern psychological science ascribes great importance to the racial consciousness as a factor in individual character, and is quite with Wordsworth in treating the child-nature with the utmost respect'<sup>1</sup> Nothing, however, in Wordsworth's poetry supports this interpretation. Let us quote some passages which bear on this subject. He thinks that instinct belittles value. It belittles the value of the 'maternal sympathy itself', so far as this is, 'though strong',

a joyless tie  
Of naked instinct, wound about the heart  
*Address to my Infant Daughter, Dora, 37*

One thing Wordsworth admires in children is pensive pity in face of others' sorrows

little children,  
Rushing along in the full tide of play,  
Stood silent as we passed them!  
*The Borderers, III, 1331.*

This does not point especially to anything definitely hereditary, or instinctive: it is *pity*, untouched, uneffaced, either by habit (cf. *The Prelude*, VII, 332), or by the practical abstractly objective point of view according to which anyone's moment of sorrow, or of suffered wrong, is not an *infinite*, but an infinitesimal thing, of no more weight than a drop in the sea.

Children show strong affections towards people regardless of social, racial or colour distinctions (unless low pride and selfishness make them soon aware of such distinctions—though this is, I suppose, comparatively rare). This must have impressed Wordsworth. He does not say it, but he often stigmatizes the fact of overwhelming social 'extrinsic differences' (cf. *The Prelude*, XIII, 216). Besides, he was

<sup>1</sup> W R Inge, *Studies of English Mystics*, 1921, p. 203

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

convinced at heart  
How little those formalities, to which  
With overweening trust alone we give  
The name of Education, have to do  
With real feeling and just sense,

*The Prelude*, XIII, 168

Everything is *more real* when we are children and, in and through this strong adherence to reality, days appear to be fuller and longer (cf *To a Butterfly*, 18) This stronger faith, this creative faith, seems to belong to life and intelligence in its intenser growth and vivacity The 'creative sensibility', likewise, to which Wordsworth emphatically calls our attention, with reference to youth and childhood, does not point to a peculiarly hereditary and instinctive element Cf the passage

that I still retained  
My first creative sensibility,  
That by the regular action of the world  
My soul was unsubdued

*Id*, II, 359

He admires in children joy, an original joy, actual, neither especially hereditary, nor pre-natal, nor transcendently explained or interpreted

Even so this happy Creature of herself  
Is all-sufficient, solitude to her  
Is blithe society, who fills the air  
With gladness and involuntary songs  
*Characteristics of a Child three Years old*, 11

But, among many passages, the following is the most significant, and it explicitly points to that *active* principle, the concept of which we find often expressed in Wordsworth's poetry, as we have seen, through many examples, in the preceding pages

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!  
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought,  
from my first dawn

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me  
The passions that build up our human soul,  
*The Prelude*, I, 401, 405

Cf also, in this connection, *Rob Roy's Grave*, 29, *The Prelude*, I 555, XIII, 309, XIV, 215

Even if there were one and the same perpetuated and unsegregated seed in all the seeds of men and animals and plants, this would give us neither universality nor infinity. Conditions, as such, also organized conditions, point to the particular—the infinite and the universal, in so far as we may know, or conceive, belong only to the living present.

The simple fact that deep feelings, and mental attitudes, and notions, with which we are generally acquainted in adult life, appear in children unapprehended, may indeed, without need of anything else, be a cause of admiration. Yet it seems to me that by referring them to instincts or to the hereditary element, rather than to something more intelligible and nearer, and *actual*, and deeper, the feeling awakened in us would be that of surprise and curiosity, rather than the impassioned admiration often expressed by poets.

Memories from past existences, on the other hand, or from the obscure intervals between them—supposing these were experiences of a higher kind than ours—could afford a less unintelligible explanation. Let us say, however, by way of parenthesis, that the great mass of documents collected to support the reincarnationist theory presents us only with recognitions of places and persons and with ordinary and dreary things, and, though it discloses once more a world of will and purpose, there is nothing in it, to the best of my knowledge, which directly speaks in favour of the moral meaning of the doctrine itself. Wordsworth might have been impressed by the fact that sometimes children ask strangely deep questions, for instance, about good and evil, about life and death, about God, and show an interest in philosophical matters, which afterwards they lose. The words, in the Ode,

those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things

*Intimations* , 145

may be referred to this

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Still commenting the Ode, W. R. Inge writes 'There seems to be no reason why, as we get older, we should recede further from the knowledge of Divine truth'<sup>1</sup> If this is meant to refer to a knowledge of transcendent origin, I have nothing to say. But in so far as an actual, intrinsically characterized cause is concerned, this would not be true. Where life is in the growing and presumably most *alive*, all that immediately belongs to its spiritual essence and cause—to the creative unity and its deep actual infinity—is likely to be, quite intelligibly, and is, in fact, outstandingly apparent. Thus we find in youth, in a higher degree, or more generally, courage and readiness to die. And this does not require either a divine, or a 'racial' explanation. Nor does it depend on a 'superabundance' of strength, or life, or spirit—a materialistic interpretation, which has been adopted by high theologians, rather it occurs, I hold, because life is the less fossilized and adheres less to the particularity of its *formed* forms and sets of conditions, and the subtle power of thought and life, which ever transcends any *given* form and self, is, in a higher degree, present—as it may be present also in people old and weak.

I could hardly refrain from quoting these extracts from Inge (I beg the reader to consult the full text) because the things I am saying about thought's original character may seem obvious, and it must be pointed out to what an extent they are overlooked by cultured people and by trained philosophers. And it is the more strange that they are overlooked in this case, inasmuch as the philosopher-theologian could have learned from Christ himself a far more adequate interpretation of Wordsworth's Ode, for the words which refer to children in the Gospels bear perfectly upon the subject—and, moreover, they are so much the more impressive and precious (in my opinion) as they are among those which most unmistakably point to the distinct personality, individually and historically real, of Jesus—as a thinker and as a poet. Certainly Inge is not ignorant of the concept of an actual cause. But he is liable to forget it, and this, indeed, is not entirely his fault. For this very concept (that also must be pointed out) as it is generally represented, and *constructed*, falls short of experience, and needs some retouching.

<sup>1</sup> *Op cit*, p. 203

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

9 Wordsworth discovers everywhere, in animate and in inanimate things, radical aspects of one creative reality—either as belonging to our own mind, and to the qualities of things as perceived or imaged by us, or, in living organisms, as belonging partially or entirely to them. Let us first collect some examples as regards inanimate things

Why stand we gazing on the sparkling Brine,  
With wonder smit by its transparency,  
And all-enraptured with its purity?—  
Because the unstained, the clear, the crystalline,  
Have ever in them something of benign,

*By the Sea-shore, Isle of Man, 1*

The words 'purity' and 'transparency', for instance, have their perpetual origin *a parte subjecti* inasmuch as they get their quality from the non-composite character of the synthesis, its inviolable, undefiled and, in a sense, unreachable novelty, its *potential* and undivided intensity, its intrinsic and primal character in so far as it eclipses forms, and self, and from other kindred values. It is here noticeable, among other things, how the spiritual qualities of which we become aware at the sight of sea and springs and waters, and which we see in their aspect—and hardly can refrain from supposing to exist in their physical nature—are daringly expressed in and for themselves and without support of objective existents (cf 'the unstained', 'the clear', 'the crystalline'). Each of them is here a poetical, not an abstract reality. It is made a 'concrete universal', widely comprehensive. Obviously, while reading these lines, we may conceive 'the crystalline' as *materially* concrete, finite, exclusive of other aspects of existence, as a *general* noun standing for many or numberless materially concrete and finite objects. This would be really a *general* and *abstract* concept, as opposed to concrete universals or *real* concepts.

Calm is the fragrant air, and loth to lose  
Day's grateful warmth,

*Evening Voluntaries, I, 1*

The day is placid in its going,  
To a lingering motion bound,

*The White Doe of Rylstone, 148*



## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

*Form* as intrinsically purposive, self-sufficient, self-dependent, superseding extrinsic action, and other aspects—essential motive-values—of contemplative thought are here expressed

Soft clouds, the whitest of the year,  
Sailed through the sky

*Beggars, Sequel, 23*

The words 'sailing' and 'gliding' are, so to say, a favourite pigment in Wordsworth's palette. They are raised to a high poetical value—which, however, in embryo, they contain also in everyday language. The self-sustaining cause and its ever-untainted novelty, and a feeling of the perpetuity of the sources, share in this image—are expressed, revealed through it

Old Time      upon these wounds hath laid  
His lenient touches, soft as light that falls,  
From the wan Moon, upon the towers and walls,  
*Light deepening the profoundest sleep of shade*

*Composed among the Ruins of  
a Castle in North Wales, 4, 5*

'Shade', in the last line quoted, marks a certain degree of indeterminacy and infinitude. 'Sleep' contributes a wider and at the same time more real, positive character (the 'shade' *lives*, however silently and secretly, if it 'sleeps'). The 'light', if it were that of the sun, would be a disturbing, destructive element. But the light 'that falls' 'from the wan Moon' represents a most delicate principle of presentness and form. Through this, and in that *potency*—which is already conceived as living and actual—a new and deeper infinity, to a higher degree creative and primal, is disclosed. Moreover, that which is felt as indeterminate and infinitely formative is also—and intelligibly—felt as intimate. Hence these shades of infinity also express a value of intimacy. All these aspects of things are at one and the same time aspects of creative indeterminacy, and they possess, I maintain, at once an aesthetic and an ontological value.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that, precisely in this fervid, highly original moment of thought, we find probably the best example of alliteration in Wordsworth's poetry. The sound of the word 'sleep' shares in the sounds of all the other words of the verse (except the word 'light'). See in this connection Chapter I, § 26

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

But there are glimpses of landscape in which (if we may leave aside the beauties of the chosen subject, everything that may be referred to mere contemplation of the landscape itself) the very power of short verbal images seem to be the only essential truth revealed

The lightsome Olive's twinkling canopy  
*The Cuckoo at Laverna*, 21

When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils,  
The waves beside them danced, but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee  
*'I wandered lonely as a cloud'*, 3, 13

10 It is especially while hearing the song of birds that Wordsworth is brought, let us say, face to face with the *ubiquity* of the creative principle—which craves for shape and location and yet constantly and essentially transcends them. Both this form-transcendancy, this (in a sense) invisible nature of the creative principle and its omni-original, universal character, felt as such, are expressed in the following extract

O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,  
Or but a wandering Voice?  
Even yet thou art to me  
No bird, but an invisible thing,  
A voice, a mystery,  
*To the Cuckoo*, 3, 14

All the landscape is transfigured by, and partakes in, this mystery, and presentness, and spiritual lightness

O blessèd Bird! the earth we pace  
Again appears to be  
An unsubstantial, faery place,  
That is fit home for Thee!

*Id*, 29

Compare *The Green Linnet*, 15, 21

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Of a bird unnamed, Wordsworth observes, admiringly

how he sings  
As if he wished the firmament of heaven  
Should listen, and give back to him the voice  
Of his triumphant constancy and love,

*The Excursion*, VI, 882

The deep intrinsic and self-transcendent value of joy and love, their claim for universality, are here expressed. For creative joy, the poet says on another occasion, is 'imperfect while unshared' (*Id.*, IX, 587)

A character of spontaneity is eagerly sought in the flight of the waterfowl. Wordsworth is wondering at something in it intricate and rich, 'unperplexed', yet certainly not automatic or mechanical

• • • • •  
Hundreds of curves and circlets, to and fro,  
Upward and downward, progress intricate  
Yet unperplexed, as if one spirit swayed  
Their indefatigable flight

*Water Fowl*, 11

Here is the image of a swan (Wordsworth often delights in describing this bird)

• • • • •  
As the mute swan that floats adown the stream,  
Or, on the waters of the unruffled lake,  
Anchors her placid beauty

*The Excursion*, VI, 293

(Cf. *An Evening Walk*, 220) The *self-sustaining*, the *self-purposive*, the *perpetual*, the *untainted* are qualities or aspects of original causality embodied and revealed in the image, and are essentially constituting its reality and beauty. The image of the swan is made almost, *a parte subjecti*, of the same stuff as the image of the clouds (see above, § 9)

Many a passage from 'The White Doe of Rylstone' should be remembered in the present connection, and it is difficult to make a choice. I will quote the following

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

And through yon gateway, where is found,  
Beneath the arch with ivy bound,  
Free entrance to the churchyard ground—  
Comes gliding in with lovely gleam,  
Comes gliding in serene and slow,  
Soft and silent as a dream  
A solitary Doe!

*The White Doe of Rylstone, 52*

In the Swan, in the unnamed Bird, in the Cuckoo, in the Green Linnet and in the Skylark (in a poem here not quoted), and in the Doe, Wordsworth detects and depicts again and again the same creative novelty—the same spiritual essence—without defining to what extent he sees it in the mere aspect of the living being, as it appears to us, or also and chiefly and absolutely in the living being itself, in its inward life and soul. But we find also, unequivocally, the latter and, in some respects, more penetrative view. And, at one and the same time, we find expressed and asserted that charity towards animals, which, I think, is inseparable from a deep sense of the *actual* cause of life. Let me quote, for instance, the following lines, where words are addressed to the memory of a dead dog.

For love, that comes wherever life and sense  
Are given by God, in thee was most intense,  
Yea, for thy fellow-brutes in thee we saw  
A soul of love, love's intellectual law  
*Tribute to the Memory of a Favourite Dog, 27, 32*

## Chapter 7

### SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

1772-1834

THE POETICAL WORKS OF SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE *Macmillan*, 1924 (First Edition 1893)

1 It would be worth while to compare in the works of a writer his direct, i.e., *poetical* insight into *self-activity*, with, even on the same page and in the same context, his, in a sense, more systematic philosophical thought, in a higher degree intentional and inferential, to consider (adopting Coleridge's words) 'truth operative',<sup>1</sup> truth 'original—more accurately ever-originating',<sup>2</sup> as compared with a process of thought in which the author is sharply distinct from his subject-matter, and deals with it in a more abstract and more deliberate way, and often apparently—and many times only apparently—more cautious, to throw into relief how this externally constructive thought proceeds with great assurance, and yet with slow progress, how its efforts are for the most part concerned with overthrowing previous more one-sided and shallow and vicious views, and eventually how the non-ephemeral value of each philosophical system is trusted to, and depends on, the first rather than the second element—however precious, and in some measure necessary, that element may be I must renounce this research, which, in order to attain

<sup>1</sup> 'truth operative, and by effects continually alive, is the mistress of poets, who hath not her existence in matter, but in reason' *Biographia Literaria*, Dent, reprinted 1934, p. 238 Coleridge opposes 'truth operative' to truth 'narrative and past'

<sup>2</sup> Not exactly referred to truth. Quoted by John H. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher*, 1930, p. 184, cf. p. 168

## SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

a certain satisfactory degree, would involve a new history of philosophy—and literature—envisaged from this point of view. Even were I to confine myself to Coleridge's works, this would require an entire volume and a lifelong study.

It is especially in Coleridge's literary criticism that his language is pregnant with concepts which radically belong to the creative elements in psychic reality. I do not doubt that his prose works and conversations contributed, indirectly, to the poetry of his age, and of the generations following, especially through their influence, however slight or subtle, on language itself. For, generally speaking, it is in this way—that is to say, by enriching language and using words in their deeper meaning—that philosophy most contributes to poetry. It is indeed also true that every great poet, in order to be able to say his own word, a new word, strives to absorb, in the measure of his capacity, the philosophy and culture of his age and of all the past. But philosophical systems are often inassimilable or only partially assimilable by him, and generally the fault, I think, does not lie with him. It is through the use of words, by eliciting from them, or recalling them to, a deeper spiritual meaning, that systematic philosophy has been a most vital factor in poetry. Thus the Italian poets of the fourteenth century—when philosophy, we may add, had comparatively a greater part in general culture than it has to-day—found at their disposal a glowing *medium* of words, inherited from ancient philosophy and interpreted, enriched, and in many respects deepened by medieval philosophers, theologians and mystics.

But as regards Coleridge's own poetry, we may sometimes doubt, while perusing it, whether it found a help and not a drawback in the fact that perhaps the main centre of his philosophical interest and developments was outside his poems.

2 It might even be jocosely said of Coleridge, that his poetry, aware of the dangers of a divided interest, tried to find an escape from philosophy—in magic. When the Word is no longer the Logos, the source of all intelligibility, but is instead the magical word, it becomes something philosophically obscure. It acquires a character of compulsion—of external compulsion—foreign to

## SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

truth. Indeed it is still a principle of wide cosmic significance. We must, I hold, advance the hypothesis that in the constitution of our physical and psychical frame, in the reproduction of individual organisms, similar as they are (in a given species or variety) according to a typical process of development in spite of disturbing conditions, a very important rôle is played, not precisely by 'words' or verbal images, but certainly by presentments or images of some kind, obstinately persistent, self-centred, self-closed. It is especially in the phenomena of post-hypnotic suggestion, and of hypnotic suggestion in general—once they are not explained away with quite inadequate theories—that we may find an analogy and clue to what may be the meaning and function of images in organic nature.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the obscurely compulsory power of form, which has made its appearance more than once in literary fashions, is certainly not the highest factor in poetry.<sup>2</sup> And it seems to me that 'Kubla Khan', and even 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', and other poems of Coleridge, in which the uncanny element is paramount, may constitute a brilliant picture-gallery, full of glamour and impressive, but not rising above that strongly marked characterization which high art, in its feeling for universality, always rejects or overcomes. With this I do not say that there are not, in these poems, passages in which the verse shines with the highest spiritual light, as when the Ancient Mariner, who has blasphemed against life and murdered it, sees life in its purity and blessedness reappear (cf. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 282 ff.)

<sup>3</sup> However, the greater number of Coleridge's poems are not characterized by the blinding fascination of a somehow externalized and fixed form, and we may find in some passages the very first nucleus of his philosophy—not an abstract of it, not merely referred to, but native there, and outrunning all preconceived conceptions.

Creative indeterminacy, the reality of infinity with which we are concerned, seems to be interpreted by Coleridge as a *pervad-*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my work *Studi sulle precognizioni*, 1937, Part II, §§ 5 and 6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chapter V, § 1.

## SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

*ing identity*,<sup>1</sup> which is neither a sheer negative nor a sheer positive thing (as objects are bound to be according to the logic of mere existents, or formal logic, which he, as a foicunner, rejected) Many a vital quality intrinsically pertains to this *primum datum* in Coleridge's thought, and especially unity, individuality, and a primordial value of self-transcendency or universality, and joy, and hope Hope is borne on the very wings of song, has in song a perpetual birth (cf *Sonnet to Robert Southey*, 6, *To the Rev W J Hort*, 7)

Hope is intelligible, up to a certain point, in the nature of the mental synthesis, for which past and future are intimately and primarily (and not *first* pragmatically) entirely different values Yet, by starting from the conception of the creative essence as we might imagine it while leaving aside as far as possible hope itself and its kindred concepts, we should never guess the tremendous interest for and urge towards the future, which characterizes life And while conceiving hope as an ultimate reality and representing it in its distinct and genuine value—as especially Milton and Coleridge seem inclined to do—poetry, as it is its vital impulse, strives after the fountain-head of inner being and points out a wide and fecund and yet, in many a quarter, often forgotten problem

In the following lines the luminous, simple and rich principle which, without much fear of mistake, we may say constitutes the nucleus of Coleridge's philosophy and poetry, is depicted, or rather embodied, in its full value

O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me  
What this strong music in the soul may be!  
What, and wherein it doth exist,  
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,  
This beautiful and beauty-making power

*Dejection: an Ode*, 59

Compare also the passage

Onward still I toil,  
I know not, ask not whither! A new joy,

<sup>1</sup> Cf J H Muirhead, *op cit*, p 98



## SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Lovely as light, sudden as summer gust,  
And gladsome as the first-born of the spring,  
Beckons me on,

*The Picture*, 6

Coleridge depicts in forcible words the original element he sees in self-activity. He asks, 'What is life?', and concisely expresses his thought by saying that it is

An absolute self—an element ungrounded—

*What is Life?*, 3

He more than once calls life—or that essence of essence of life—'invulnerable' ('Life invulnerable', *On a Cataract*, 24, cf *Hymn before Sun-rise*, 44). It is above all in *contemplation* that he recognizes freedom's inmost reality, and, at one and the same time, life's original and universal principle (cf *France, an Ode*, 89 ff, cf also *The Garden of Boccaccio*, 49 ff)

The following lines contain an old and simple truth

There are two births, the one when Light  
First strikes the new-awaken'd sense—  
The other when two souls unite,  
And we must count our life from then

*Fragment*, 'There are two births'

It is indeed a simple and old truth, but an essential one, and alive, i.e., expressed, not described, therefore never superseded and unrevealing. In fact, unlike the numberless fictitious new 'starts' hypostatized by philosophers, at once dogmatically and mysteriously, in the life of the spirit, this is not fictitious and is intimately intelligible. The value of universality, which is inherent in subjective 'light' experienced and felt as a principle, possesses a radically different and, let us say, more massive power and significance when the distance, and the opposition, between two living beings is overcome. This is true, however, only in so far as their union does not lose the freshness, purity and innocence of its original impulse and does not become in its turn a reason of exclusion, of hard, blind oblivion, and pride, and cruelty, in respect of everything outside them.

## Chapter 8

### PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

1792-1822

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THE COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS OF PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY  
*Oxford University Press*, 1935 (First Edition, 1905)

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I I must apologize for breaking, as it were, poems into fragments of poems, and almost lacerating them, in order to distil their honey for my own purposes. But these purposes are worth pursuing, for they consist, firstly, in bringing into relief the poets' contribution to philosophy, secondly, in the endeavour to get a more explicit and clearer consciousness of the reality of thought—which constitutes the specific aim, and the very definition, of philosophy, thirdly, in throwing new light on the essential rôle of philosophy itself in literary and art criticism.

If we say that we are one with a person, whom we love, we hardly say anything philosophically significant or unequivocal, unless or until the characteristic and surpassing value of this *oneness* is elicited. It is by the term 'annihilation', as he most forcibly employs it, that Shelley expresses and reveals the real content and the very principle of this *oneness*, especially in its form-transcending character, while the full weight of his personality, and his philosophical insight, are contained in the expression itself.

We shall become the same, we shall be one  
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?  
One passion in twin-hearts,  
One hope within two wills, one will beneath

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,  
One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,  
And one annihilation

*Epipsychidion*, 573, 584.

In one of Shelley's earlier poems, 'The Revolt of Islam', written in 1817, we find the same concept expressed, the same reality questioned

Was it one moment that confounded thus  
All thought, all sense, all feeling, into one  
Unutterable power, which shielded us  
Even from our own cold looks, when we had gone  
Into a wide and wild oblivion  
Of tumult and of tenderness?  
I know not

What is the strong control  
Which leads the heart that dizzy steep to climb,  
Where far over the world those vapours roll,  
Which blend two restless frames in one reposing soul?  
*The Revolt of Islam*, 2641, 2650, 2655

With reference to our main contention and to a point upon which I have laid special stress, we are here confronted with the question If 'annihilation' is—as indeed it is—but another name for (psychic) indeterminacy, how can it be maintained that this principle of unity and creativity is really, fully intelligible? If it is a fundamental moment of original causality, how can it be maintained that life—which is supposed to have in it its perennial subjective source—is intelligible, and not 'irrational'? How can it be maintained, as I maintain, that art, which is one of its chiefest expressions, bears witness to the intelligibility of reality, and that it forms the very centre of our intelligible world?

'Annihilation' (that is to say, form- and self-annihilation) is a new and wider birth—psychic activity revealed in its intrinsic or *eternal* character and in its vital, endless overcoming of multiplicity and form. Undoubtedly it is not easy to accept it as a *primum datum*. It lays bare the reality, and the problem, of the spirit. It calls up new problems. But, on the other hand, this supreme moment of self- and form-obliviation is not unintel-

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

ligible in the sense in which the processes, or the representations of them, which physicists encounter in subatomic physics, are or seem to be radically unintelligible, because self-contradictory. And it is not unintelligible in the sense in which the Unknowable is such—the apparently self-contradictory character of the transcendent divine reality, conceived as immobile (or neither immobile nor mobile), both creative and timeless. It is a concept which blends with all concepts through which we interpret and represent life. It is a concept which does not admit of analysis, according to the more generally accepted meaning of the word ‘analysis’, but this is due essentially to its nature, not to any incapability of ours. It does not necessarily ‘tease us out of thought’, but simply and plainly calls to be further investigated in its implications and difficulties.

2 Implicitly, any interpretation whatever is rejected which claims to explain the deadly and sweet rapture, to which reference is made, on the ground of second causes—as if it were, for instance, but a trick of nature (*plus* a process of ‘sublimation’, owing to our own fervid imagination) with the function of keeping up the reproduction of the species. But what matters, and must be emphasized, is that we are met, in the above-quoted passages, with an especially strong argument against such kind of explanations. For this principle of deathlike extinction can be traced most abundantly and distinctly in Shelley’s poems as one which can be better known in its highest and most explicit forms, in thought’s clearest, most essential and penetrating expressions, and which belongs to the substantial logic of thought and not, in the first place, to a quite particular set of conditions.

This essentially *logical* principle—most evident in the most lively moments of thought’s very originality—informs all Shelley’s poetry and life. Very few, probably, have lived it out so entirely and deeply as Shelley. Even the manner of his death, his *factual* death, seems to be its crude but coherent expression. This may also have been a casual coincidence, yet it is significant, in this connection, that in his early poem ‘Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude’ (written in 1815) he seemed to foresee just the way of his death.

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

A restless impulse urged him to embark  
And meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste,  
*Alastor*, 304

The concept of the unity between two human beings—as an abysmal principle, implying self-surrender, but not primarily constituted by it—is again brought into full expression in the 'Epipsychidion', in the following passage

To whatsoe'er of dull mortality  
Is mine, remain a vestal sister still,  
To the intense, the deep, the imperishable,  
Not mine but me, henceforth be thou united  
Even as a bride, delighting and delighted  
*Epipsychidion*, 389

We are confronted here with a moral problem, which, though only by way of parenthesis, we have to consider. For little seems to be left to Shelley's dear wife, seeing that his soul, if not his body, abandons her. His love is here at strife (as we may assume) with his pity—and loyalty—towards his life's companion. Conventional values would be easily disregarded by Shelley but these are original values, sharing in the nature of love itself. Cf also, in this connection, Shelley's words in the same poem

How beyond refuge I am thine  
*Id*, 51

But we cannot judge by abstract rules. We ought to identify ourselves with the full inward reality of his thought at that moment and to know if it meant *more* responsibility, and suffering, and love, and spirit, or rather indifference and lightness of heart. That which is practically the same act may be, obviously, quite a different thing in two persons, or even in two different moments of one's life.

In the following lines we find the kinship pointed out between thought in its inmost urge for all-comprehensiveness, in its infinity—questioning, as it were, its own boundaries, doubting about its own truth—and art, and love's passion. It is grounded,

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

this kinship, in one common principle, the dominant aspect of which is self- and form-transcendancy (cf 'death'), as a highly positive reality

Heardst thou not, that  
thought, to the world's dim boundaries clinging,  
And music, when one beloved is singing,  
Is death?

*Rosalind and Helen*, 1123, 1127

The inward process of a thought which lingers in its forms, eventually to dissolve, both because these forms become insignificant, and because of a longing for infinity which is inherent in this thought and indeed in these very forms and in each item of them,<sup>1</sup> this process of thought's inward logic is a constant motive-value in Shelley's poetry. The following fragment may provide an illustration

like some harmonious thought,  
Wasting itself on that which it had wrought,  
Till it dies

*Julian and Maddalo, Cancelled Fragments*, 624

'To waste', 'to dissolve', 'to die', 'to faint', 'to fail', and 'self-consuming', these verbs, often recurring in Shelley's poems, obviously are not used in their negative meaning, but, in different measure, they express a wild embracing of infinitude.<sup>2</sup> Let us also quote, as particularly significant in this respect, the following extracts

in that best philosophy, whose taste  
Makes this cold common hell, our life, a doom  
As glorious as a fiery martyrdom,

*Epipsychdion*, 213

A radiant death, a fiery sepulchre,

*Id.*, 223

<sup>1</sup> Cf Chapter I, §§ 3-5 and Chapter XVIII, § 4

<sup>2</sup> Cf *The Daemon of the World*, 331, *The Revolt of Islam*, 501, 664, *Rosalind and Helen*, 779, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 28, *Epipsychdion*, 5, 450, *To Constantia*, 30, *Another Fragment to Music* (1817), 1, *Ode to the West Wind*, 53, *The Indian Serenade*, 17, *To Sophia*, 15, *With a Guitar*, *To Jane*, 6, *Love's Rose*, 7

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Form in its inmost and highly indeterminate principle—that is to say, the infinite want of form—is in the following image embodied as the Lover, whom the actual *form* ('the tender light') excites, provokes

an endless spring of gloom,  
Upon whose edge hovers the tender light,  
Trembling to mingle with its paramour,

*Orpheus*, 12

No external mingling is described, of things taken in their objective identity, which would be ontologically and poetically insignificant, and with hardly any but fictitious relation with the image itself. This *mingling* reflects and actuates, unintentionally, perhaps, and so much the more significantly, the intimate logic of love and of thought—*expression* uniting with the concept it is called to express, causing it in part, summoning it, yet made into its transparent medium, disappearing, being lost into it

3 There is in *seeing* an inevitable drawback, a tendency to perceive things in their objective multiplicity and to overlook the potential and infinite element which lies in the very nature of freedom—of creativity, of spirit. Therefore Shelley often directs our attention to that which can be 'felt', not 'seen'.<sup>1</sup>

The happiest example I find, in which the (in a sense) invisible character of the active principle is expressed, is the following. Shelley speaks about his beloved and the 'glory of her being', which he describes as 'one intense Diffusion', 'one serene Omnipresence', whose outlines are eventually lost,

and in that Beauty furl'd  
Which penetrates and clasps and fills the world,  
Scarce visible from extreme loveliness

*Epipsychidion*, 102

Every quality of things *qua* sensed is something more than a particular quality, belonging to a given object. And the principle

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Revolt of Islam*, 2659, *Prometheus Unbound*, II, v, 17, 64, *Epipsychidion*, 479, *Id.*, *Fragments connected with*, 148 ('felt', not 'touched'), *To a Skylark*, 20 ('heard', not 'seen'), *The Zucca*, 22. Cf. also *Lines written in the Bay of Lerici*, 11 ('silent to the ear').

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

which overcomes the object's particularity, and finiteness, lies in the quality itself<sup>1</sup> This makes itself 'scarce visible' through its ever-original indeterminacy or *potency* Also visible light (*qua* sensed) contains the seed of an inexhaustible self-transcendence and of an ever greater transparency And certainly there is a common nature in visible light and in the light that shines through the poem (A blind man could have the 'Epipsychidion' read to him in order *to see light*, for, indeed, light is enshrined in the poem!)

See *Id*, 546 Compare also the passage

Till the isle's beauty, like a naked bride  
Glowing at once with love and loveliness,  
Blushes and trembles at its own excess

*Id*, 474

Form—that is to say, consciousness, value, in their immediate presentness—when most intense, is self-dissolving not because, or not only because, it exceeds and, in some way, breaks its ordinary set of conditions, but intimately, essentially, because it merges in the *potential* and in the intrinsic or *eternal* character of its principle<sup>2</sup>

4 Many a word and image depicts in Shelley's poetry, directly and freshly, in unconventional ways, the *actual cause*—that creative element which is most distinctly called 'spirit' whenever it realizes itself in its deepest *freedom* and in the fullness and unity of its manifold aspects It is represented as the 'maddening wine of life'

Hither the sound has borne us—to the realm  
Of Demogorgon, and the mighty portal,  
Whence the oracular vapour is hurled up  
Which lonely men drink wandering in their youth,

<sup>1</sup> Cf Chapter XVIII, §§ 3-5

<sup>2</sup> Cf Chapters I, §§ 3, 4, 30, III, § 1, IV, VI, § 2 However, concerning value and consciousness, as contrasted, cf Chapter XVII, § 1



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

And call truth, virtue, love, genius, or joy,  
That maddening wine of life, whose dregs they drain  
To deep intoxication,

*Prometheus Unbound*, II, III, I, 4

It is 'like a want'

And universal Pan, 'tis said, was there,  
And though none saw him,—through the adamant  
Of the deep mountains, through the trackless air,  
And through those living spirits, like a want,  
He passed

*The Witch of Atlas*, 113

It is, at one and the same time, 'a power', 'a thirst', and 'a knowledge'

for now

A power, a thirst, a knowledge, which below  
All thoughts doth ever flow,  
Came on us, as we sate in silence there,

*The Revolt of Islam*, 2599, 2602

It is 'the soul's giant harp' (*Fragments Connected with Epipsychidion*, 138, see also, *Id* 134-40, *To the Lord Chancellor*, 28 'the lyre of mind')

It is 'a master-key' (*Fragment, Wedded Souls*, 9), 'the key of truths' (*The Revolt of Islam*, 3113) It is 'the harmony of truth' (*Epipsychidion*, 216) It is 'Truth, liberty, and love' (*Prometheus Unbound*, I, 651)

It is, above all, an 'awful Loveliness'—the faith of his life

They know that never joy illumed my brow  
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free  
This world from its dark slavery,  
That thou—O awful LOVELINESS,  
Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express  
*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, 68

5 Let us now consider some less general, yet not less radical

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

aspects of the ever-originating power of thought, as expressed and revealed by Shelley

*Height* It is above all in his poem 'To a Skylark' that Shelley wonders at a *value of height*—which may be envisaged as constituting a distinct and fundamental problem in mental life, see further on, § 27 I quote here a fragment from the 'Ode to Liberty', which points to a value both of novelty and *height*, and distinctly expresses it in that unity of values which is spirit The voices of ancient bards and sages resound through Greece, and we hear

A wingèd sound of joy, and love, and wonder,  
Which soars where Expectation never flew  
*Ode to Liberty*, 84

This value of height, as original and ultimate, is most impressively represented while being identified with poetical inspiration

Woe is me!  
The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce  
Into the height of Love's rare Universe,  
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire .  
*Epipsychidion*, 587

Cf *Id*, 123 Poets, generally, ask the Muses for help in order to rise to the height of their subject, but Shelley—as Adolfo de Bosis, who translated into Italian many of his poems, used to say—only asks for their help (in his own way, for he does not mention them) while downhill descending, while losing that power, and coming back to his minor self This is more natural, for we cannot *seek* poetical power or inspiration, and indeed, *invocations* are in the main, when they are poetically justified, but a way of expressing that such a power is present On the other hand, that feeling of failing is obvious, and revealing Value, by its own nature, depends on its creative novelty, and is transient The same moment, however, is envisaged by Shelley also from a non-retrospective point of view We may compare the following passages

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

I measure  
The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,  
And find—alas! mine own infirmity

*Id*, 69

The breath whose might I have invoked in song  
Descends on me, my spirit's bark is driven,  
Far from the shore,

*Adonais*, 487

Cf also *Epipsychidion*, 33, *Alastor*, 1-49, *The Revolt of Islam*, 3765

6 *Novelty and universality* Words expressing an intimate value of novelty play in Shelley's poetry a dominant rôle. They are possessed with the highest power, compare, for instance, the use of the words in the following passages: *To a Skylark*, 5, 38 ('unpremeditated', 'unbidden'), *Id*, 60 ('joyous, and clear, and fresh'), *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 49 ('with new gladness'), *Epipsychidion*, 120 ('A Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning'—that is to say, *that* through which they are comparable)

Novelty (creative, essential novelty) is substantial, constitutive, not only in the nature of individuality, but also and especially, in all value of universality.<sup>1</sup> 'He does not love at all, who loves enough,' says the mystic. The very 'Golden Rule', charity, does not exist, except in so far as it is found again in the essentially boundless moment of form-in-the-making, intensive and *potential* (free). *Fixedness* is the ideal condition for conventional and utilitarian values, quite the contrary for real value. This most fundamental truth is forcibly and searchingly expressed in the following lines

Narrow

The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,  
The life that wears, the spirit that creates  
One object, and one form, *and builds thereby*  
*A sepulchre for its eternity*

*Epipsychidion*, 169

Cf *The Revolt of Islam*, 866, *The Witch of Atlas*, 590

<sup>1</sup> Cf my work *Il concetto dell' indeterminazione*, §§ 60, 68, 103, and in this volume, *Index*, 'Novelty and universality'

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Yet if *novelty* is merged in a value of universality—which is born of *novelty* itself—it keeps, nevertheless, a distinct character. There is in it an original power of form, an ever-original joy, a ‘delight’, which appears to be a primal cause in original indeterminacy itself, irreducible to it. Hence, in part, the force and meaning of the following lines, in which the ‘Spirit of Delight’ is felt, indeed, as real in itself, self-dependent, and regenerating, *innocent* (cf. Chapter V, § 3), as life’s very principle

Rarely, rarely, comest thou,  
Spirit of Delight!

Let me set my mournful ditty  
To a merry measure,  
Thou wilt never come for pity,  
Thou wilt come for pleasure,

But above all other things,  
Spirit, I love thee—  
Thou art love and life! Oh, come,  
Make once more my heart thy home

Song, ‘*Rarely, rarely*’, I, 19, 25, 45

Compare a passage in ‘Julian and Maddalo’, in which the word ‘delight’ conveys, again, an intense and transparent meaning, while expressing an *active* quality

for the winds drove  
The living spray along the sunny air  
Into our faces, the blue heavens were bare,  
Stripped to their depths by the awakening north,  
And, from the waves, sound like delight broke forth  
*Julian and Maddalo*, 21

7 *Liberty* Shelley says that the world would be but the world of despair, or a burial place,

If Liberty  
Lent not life its soul of light,

*Hellas*, 41

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

And also he says (he addresses himself to 'Liberty')

the sun's bright lamp  
To thine is a fen-fire damp

*Liberty*, 14

The word 'liberty' is used, and vindicated, in its true sense. We must here stop a moment, in order to clear away a possible and in fact frequent misunderstanding concerning the concept of 'novelty', and of 'liberty' or 'freedom'. If we have to get closer to that nuclear reality, which is 'spirit', we must understand 'freedom' as inseparable from its reality *qua* principle, and, moreover, not pragmatically, but ontologically—and in accordance with the poet's use of the word.

Freedom has been defined as the possibility, for everyone, of exerting his own activity under certain limitations. This is, from a non-abstract point of view, a *negative* definition. Also to define it as freedom from want or other calamities is to represent it in its practical content and bearing, but not in its direct subjective reality, i.e., in its original and ontological value. But freedom has also a deeper and, in a sense, more substantial meaning. It is that which Saint Paul puts into prominence by saying 'Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty' (II Cor., III, 17).

Who kills freedom, kills conscience. To destroy freedom is to destroy intimately all moral values, which are all suspended on this supreme force and yet delicate flower of life. Yet it must be emphasized (to avoid the misunderstanding above referred to) that freedom—both political and, on the other hand, contemplative and creative freedom—loses its inward content and power, is not *freedom* at all, if it is divorced from the feeling and the reality of its primal and universal character. Freedom while merged in its very principle is humility, and the psyche's manifold rose of values is contained in it, bereft of its intrinsic and primal character, it is only arbitrariness, and boast, and bombast, and Futurism in literature, and, in politics, Fascism. Only in the eternity of the spirit can we create. We must beware of the excesses of *creativism*. Yet salvation from them cannot be sought in deterministic conceptions, rather in knowing, ever more searchingly, freedom and creativeness as spirit.

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

It is in this sense that Shelley and Swinburne, above all, use the word 'freedom' and vindicate its concept

8 *Infinty* This may be felt as an actual value either with reference to the future, or to the past, or to space—which provide scarcely more than a 'means of expression', however irreplaceable

I have sent books and music there, and all  
Those instruments with which high Spirits call  
The future from its cradle, and the past  
Out of its grave, and make the present last  
In thoughts and joys which sleep, but cannot die,  
Folded within their own eternity

*Epipsychidion*, 519

'Thoughts' and 'joys' (if conditions are not entirely lacking) will for ever be recognized, called up again, in their original value, intrinsically characterized

It is still, I think, this *intrinsic character*—rather than anything especially precognitive—that lies at the source of Shelley's thought, when he speaks of song's prophetic power. Compare the last lines both of the 'Ode to the West Wind' and of the poem 'To a Skylark', and, in 'Prometheus Unbound', the passage where Asia tells how Prometheus gave man speech

and the harmonious mind  
Poured itself forth in all-prophetic song,  
*Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 75

Infinity with reference to the past

Her voice was like the wildest, saddest tone,  
Yet sweet, of some loved voice heard long ago  
*The Revolt of Islam*, 316

Infinity with reference to objective time, both past and future

Yet pause, and plunge  
Into Eternity, where recorded time,  
Even all that we imagine, age on age,  
Seems but a point, and the reluctant mind

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Flags wearily in its unending flight,  
Till it sink, dizzy, blind, lost, shelterless  
*Prometheus Unbound*, I, 416<sup>1</sup>

With reference to space

I love all waste  
And solitary places, where we taste  
The pleasure of believing what we see  
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be  
*Julian and Maddalo*, 14

Without any explicit reference either to spatial or temporal multiplicity

Entranced in some diviner mood  
Of self-oblivious solitude  
*The Daemon of the World*, 88

Cf *Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples*, 7-9

Vast and intense presentness—a lingering in the present, the feeling of being as it were suspended to its original and *eternal*, though fleeting value—is expressed in the image

Meanwhile the sun paused ere it should alight,  
Over the horizon of the mountains,—Oh,  
How beautiful is sunset, when the glow  
Of Heaven descends upon a land like thee,  
Thou Paradise of exiles, Italy!

*Julian and Maddalo*, 53

<sup>1</sup> Cf the following lines from Leopardi

and when I gaze  
Upon those infinitely more remote  
Clusters of stars, that seem  
To us like mist, to which not alone Man  
And this our earth, but all these stars of ours  
Infinite both in number and in size,  
All these, together with the golden sun,  
Are either unknown, or appear as small  
As they to earth, a point  
Of nebulous radiance,

'The Broom', *Translations from Leopardi*, by R. C. Trevelyan, 1941, p. 43. We find, sometimes, in Shelley and in Leopardi almost the same accents, especially, but not only, as regards the feeling of the infinite

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

We find here the very value expressed of contemplation, self-transcending, akin with love, implying the absence of any thought of extrinsic action, of anything extrinsic, and richness and pride of forms and, at one and the same time, actual infinity

He listens to infinity as *active* in silence, and in expectation, and in *listening* itself Let me limit myself to quoting but the following extract

In lone and silent hours,  
When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness,  
*Alastor*, 29

Cf *Adonais*, 323, *The Triumph of Life*, 67, *Orpheus*, 123

Infinity, again, or *original indeterminacy*, is expressed and revealed as 'omnipotence'

(*Ione*) Where are the Spirits fled?  
(*Panthea*) Only a sense  
Remains of them, like the omnipotence  
Of music, when the inspired voice and lute  
Languish,

*Prometheus Unbound*, I, 801.

Many a passage should be quoted in which 'night' and 'day' embody the twofold aspect of one original power—i.e., infinity and form I limit myself to quoting a fragment of the invocation in 'Alastor', introducing us, in some way, to the subject

I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain  
May modulate with murmurs of the air,  
And motions of the forests and the sea,  
And voice of living beings, and woven hymns  
Of night and day, and the deep heart of man

*Alastor*, 45.

'Night', 'Death', 'Sleep' and 'Silence' are often the images and symbols of a value of purity and self-transcendency, infinitely impersonal, non-anthropocentric Compare the lines

How wonderful is Death,  
Death and his brother Sleep!



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

One pale as yonder wan and hornèd moon,  
The other glowing like the vital morn,  
Yet both so passing strange and wonderful!

*The Daemon of the World*, I, 5, 8

Cf also *To Night*, and *Fragment, Apostrophe to Silence* (1818)

- Moonlight (and moonlit landscape) may evoke, in the highest degree, identically infinity and form—as original values, and powers, a living, subtle form which does not cover or shut out, but enhances, infinitude Only a very few, and only the mightiest • poets (in so far as I know) have found adequate words to express moonlight's mystery In 'Queen Mab' (written in 1812 probably), Shelley speaks of the 'polar night' where scarcely 'the hardest herb'

Basks in the moonlight's ineffectual glow,

*Queen Mab*, VIII, 148

Beauty—and, more generally, contemplative thought—for all its power, is incapable of extrinsic action, and also is, in a certain respect, unaffected by it Hence the word 'ineffectual', referring to moonlight and its wide transparencies, chiefly obtains its significance and its poetical value the moonlit landscape seems to share in that immunity from extrinsic causality, or in that heterogeneity in respect of it, which lies deep in the nature of thought, and almost visibly in some of its highest forms

As is the Moon, whose changes ever run  
Into themselves, to the eternal Sun,  
The cold chaste Moon, the Queen of Heaven's bright isles,  
Who makes all beautiful on which she smiles,  
That wandering shrine of soft yet icy flame  
Which ever is transformed, yet still the same,  
And warms not but illumines

*Epipsychidion*, 279

The last line of this passage obviously reflects the same concept as the word 'ineffectual' in the passage above quoted But it conveys, in a higher degree, the sense of an original reality including and, at one and the same time, transcending man and, were it possible, life itself

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

May I quote another passage:

Oh, gentle Moon, the voice of thy delight  
Falls on me like thy clear and tender light  
Soothing the seaman, borne the summer night,  
Through isles for ever calm,  
*Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 495

Cf also *To a Skylark*, 26 (see below, § 27)

9 *Sorrow* The following lines refer to a youth, Prince Athanase

Nor any could the restless griefs unravel  
Which burned within him

What sorrow, strange, and shadowy, and unknown,  
Sent him, a hopeless wanderer, through mankind?

He knew not

*Prince Athanase*, 3, 19, 58

Shelley does not say what that sorrow was, and it remains obscure Was it love before love, a craving for love? Was it an obscure urge for transcending actuality, and life, and thought itself, yet divorced from any object? Was it charity itself, under the burden of so much pain, and superflux of pain, in the wide world? Was it the appalling weight of spirit—spirit humiliated, denied, truth unrecognized?

Be this as it may, most certainly, in so far as Shelley is concerned, he bears entirely that weight of the spirit—of its truth unrecognized He bears it alone, with no support of Revelation, no assurance, of Reward And men, enwrapped in pride, may recognize and welcome new facts, not any deepening in their feelings and in their concepts or criteria of truth They need, indeed, genuine value in a thousand alloys, but they hate it unmixed They worship the Prophet dead, a thing for trade, when to quote him strengthens authority or shows erudition, but they do not appreciate him and do not like him alive, he is not 'of their crew'. It is probably in this bitter meaning that Shelley's

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

words must be understood, when he says, speaking about himself

for I am one  
Whom men love not,  
*Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples, 41*

In vain he struggles to 'relume' the 'lamp of Hope' (*The Revolt of Islam*, 1472), the 'unenvied light of hope' (*Epipsychidion*, 185)  
The following lines may be also quoted in this connection

Alas! this is not what I thought life was  
I knew that there were crimes and evil men,  
Misery and hate  
my weak breast I armed,  
To bear scorn, fear, and hate, a woful mass!  
*Fragment, 'Alas! this is not', 1, 8*

Cf *The Revolt of Islam*, 31, 119, *Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples, 19*

Genius is possessed by mental presentments, the man is their slave—as the lover is the slave of love. They possess an original life, they absorb the particular self. But then, verbal images—or pictorial, plastic, sonorous, or of any kind, in different arts and professions—at one with the thought they embody, are alive in their absolute and unique value, and are not levelled to practical standards and requirements. Then also, what is felt as at variance with truth, clings to one's mind and haunts it. So much the more is there to be expected in Shelley an intense and agonizing reaction to what he thinks to be wrongly asserted and false, and this is reflected sometimes in his poems. Compare, for instance, the lines where he speaks of the Maniac, in 'Julian and Maddalo', and of the woman, for whose sake he, the Maniac, as it seemed,

had fixed a blot  
Of falsehood on his mind which flourished not  
But in the light of all-beholding truth,  
*Julian and Maddalo, 529*

Cf also *Id.*, 406, 412

It is thought's (and love's) deepest law, that wherever there is contradiction, error, wrong, something missing, there all one's

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

mind's powers are summoned up This is not to be explained, primarily, on physiological grounds, or pragmatically, or through arguments of formal logic Thought's *infinite identity* is broken The very nature of inner being is violated—both its immediately potential, free, vitally limitless or all-inclusive, simple reality and its deeply intrinsic or eternal character These are the unparalleled, irreplaceable *forces* which come to the rescue Spirit is summoned up by its very denial Hence, chiefly, thought is or may be enhanced by sorrow Hence, also, Shelley's poetical vocation and greatness is inseparable from his capacity for sorrow The following lines may be quoted as pointing, in a general way, to this fruitfulness of sorrow

Most wretched men  
Are cradled into poetry by wrong,  
They learn in suffering what they teach in song  
*Id*, 544

Cf *To a Skylark*, 90, where another aspect of the same inter-relation is emphasized

But it is in remorse, especially, that man's gentleness and all his qualities are implied, and spirit's abysmal reality, as a problem and as a mystery, is intimated, and sorrow is most searching and fruitful The following lines do not refer to Shelley, but something of his own experience may be reflected in them

If I have erred, there was no joy in error,  
But pain and insult and unrest and terror,  
*Id*, 326

Sorrow may teach a kind of detachment from the things of the world, or from a too close adherence to them This concept is expressed in the last stanza of the poem 'Invocation to Misery', where Shelley says that all the wide world and men in it ('like multitudinous Puppets passing from a scene') mean but 'mockery' where he—and Misery, have been

But healing from sorrow, in Shelley's view, comes quite naturally, in a more direct way, from spirit itself It is neither, properly, an 'overcoming' nor a *demol* of sorrow It lies in a *renewal*, which cannot fail For sorrow is still spirit, or an aspect

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

of it, a testimony for it Self-actuating freedom is primal, and the soul's Winter can only bear witness for Spring In this sense the last line of the 'Ode to the West Wind' must be interpreted, or otherwise it would express but a too obvious truth Cf also

Many a green isle needs must be  
In the deep wide sea of Misery,

*Lines written among the Euganean Hills, 1*

His general view (and his most intimate feeling) is joyous It is reflected, for instance, in the first lines of 'The Triumph of Life', the poem on which he was engaged at the time of his death

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task  
Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth

*The Triumph of Life, 1*

Definitely pessimistic views are rarely expressed

Wail, for the world's wrong!

*A Dirge, 8<sup>1</sup>*

Compare also *The Triumph of Life*, 230

10 *Communion* Shelley searchingly points to the first principle of all communion as recognizable in thought's delicate web, in the interrelation between forms or images in one's span of consciousness, and particularly in thought's musical life

We—are we not formed, as notes of music are,  
For one another, though dissimilar,  
Such difference without discord, as can make  
Those sweetest sounds, in which all spirits shake  
As trembling leaves in a continuous air?

*Epipsychidion, 142*

(Cf *Prometheus Unbound*, III, III, 39 ) The conception expressed, or suggested, is one of the greatest significance, from a philosophical point of view, and especially to-day We must say (though it is indeed humiliating that it should be necessary to say it) that

<sup>1</sup> Written in 1822

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

to derive communion from a 'social instinct' is utterly inept. No society would come into being, if there were not in individuals a capacity for self-transcendancy, an understanding of it, however rudimentary, a need for it, not constituted, but only provoked, occasioned, by practical utilities. Altruism is no less primal than egoism. Uncritical and shallow thought conceives egoism as granted, as not needing explanation, as primal, and either denies altruism altogether, or derives it from egoism, as the product of education or as depending on a surplus of energy, or as a 'social instinct'. The 'social instinct'—as compared with 'love'—presents from the point of view of the ordinary pseudo-scientist, the advantage of being a supposed definite reality and more of the nature of a *thing*. Indeed it may be rightly conceived as a specialized form—in which organized hereditary conditions are paramount—of a more general and fundamental principle, but generally it is but an idolized non-entity, which hides a profounder reality, and shows the intellectual misery of those who, contaminating language, replace older names with this term.

The following passage expresses a thought which, in different shapes, often occurs

To the silent wilderness  
Where the soul need not repress  
Its music lest it should not find  
An echo in another's mind

*To Jane The Invitation, 23*

Cf *Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples*, 18, *Julian and Maddalo*, 208. Need for communion is characteristically strong in Shelley's attitude of mind.

Yet any feeling whatever is easily distorted when seen from the outside, in a more or less objectifying view. The faith which animates it, its inward truth and uniqueness are lost. It is bereft of its living infinity. Hence shame (*pudor*) and reserve radically belong to the intrinsic nature of inner being. This essential moment is also reflected in Shelley's poetry (Cf *Juvenilia*, *Song Despair*, 10.)

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

11 *Thought's originality and perpetuity* Let us quote but one passage, in which thought is distinctly represented in its ever-originating character. The new moment takes wing, as it were, out of the *infinite* in which the preceding one dissolves—and in tune with it

There the voluptuous nightingales,  
Are awake through all the broad noonday  
When one with bliss or sadness fails,  
Another from the swinging blossom,  
Watching to catch the languid close  
Of the last strain, then lifts on high  
The wings of the weak melody,  
'Till some new strain of feeling bear  
The song, and all the woods are mute

*Prometheus Unbound*, II, 11, 24, 30

12 '*Infinitives*'<sup>1</sup> There is undoubtedly aesthetic value in the quality real in itself, unsupported by 'existents'—or comparatively less dependent on them, radically and widely, *infinitely*, inclusive. For instance

The wingèd storms  
leave azure chasms of calm  
Over this isle, or weep themselves in dew,  
From which its fields and woods ever renew  
*Their green and golden immortality*

*Epipsychidion*, 465

Yet there is scarcely any essential ontological value here expressed, except the *infinite* which is inherent in any quality whatever (cf. the 'green' and the 'golden') *qua* sensed—here in a high degree elicited. In the bright image which we find in the same poem,

Passion's golden purity,  
*Id.*, 571

'purity', as referred to 'passion', besides being an *indeterminate*

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, §§ 11, 16

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

concept, expresses a radical aspect of life and thought in their very originality, inasmuch as it emphasizes in them an unconquerable and almost form-transcending novelty. The quality expressed is therefore in a deeper sense a *logical universal*. 'Passion' is not 'passivity', obviously, it is life as an original and *not* as a utilitarian value. It is with special vigour that Shelley here vindicates this use of the word—in disagreement with the general opinion of philosophers, but in full accordance with Giambattista Vico's philosophy.

An *essential* quality may be evoked and indeed expressed in its almost ineffable infinity and universality, and richness, by means of comparisons. For instance

In that star's smile, whose light is like the scent  
Of a jonquil when evening breezes fan it,  
*The Triumph of Life*, 419

The 'star's smile', the star's 'light', the 'evening', the 'breezes', the 'jonquil', and the 'scent'—through its peculiar indeterminateness—all these things unite in, and are contributive of, one common quality, they convey a unique sense of infinity, and purity, and tenderness. The most typical example, in this connection, may be found in the 'Epipsychidion', v. 120 (quoted below, § 28).

13 *Alliteration and onomatopoeia*. These may also be considered, I think, as the expression of an actual power of infinity, closely inherent in each item of quality both of the means of expression itself and of the objects (*qua* sensed).<sup>1</sup> I quote an extract (probably the richest, in this connection, in Shelley's poetry) from the invocation in 'Alastor', written in 1815.

If dewy morn, and odorous noon, and even,  
With sunset and its gorgeous ministers,  
And solemn midnight's tingling silentness,  
If autumn's hollow sighs in the sere wood,

.      <sup>1</sup> Cf. Chapter I, § 26



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

And winter robing with pure snow and crowns  
Of starry ice the grey grass and bare boughs,  
If spring's voluptuous pantings when she breathes  
Her first sweet kisses, have been dear to me,  
If no bright bird, insect, or gentle beast  
I consciously have injured, but still loved  
And cherished these my kindred,

*Alastor*, 5

14 *Language* Language is an expression of the same nuclear reality—radically and richly characterized by its very originality—which we call 'spirit'.

Language is a perpetual Orphic song,  
*Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 415

The verse refers to a world still to come (Prometheus has been 'unbound') but it expresses also an actual reality (cf *Id*, II, iv, 75, quoted above, § 8) Every word, in a living (not conventionally constructed) language, richly, through a kind of 'onomatopoeia'—which is not at all *imitation*—shares in the quality of all other words. Hence its unity is almost that of a work of art. Again, a language expresses radical mental attitudes, variously prevailing in one or another country, either reflecting, we may suppose, general national characteristics, or belonging to that language itself, as it develops according to its own genius. But above all, as I have already pointed out, the very formation of words depends on their origin in the really active element in mental life—that is to say, in the spiritual essence, and they reveal it. Language has a twofold source: on one hand, in this intrinsically characterized formative principle, on the other hand, in our outward experience and practical needs, i.e., in its-numberless, rather disconnected, *occasional* causes. The two elements share in every word. The first one is quickened in so far as language is *poetry* but indeed language is always in some measure *poetry* (hence the truth of the above-quoted line). Generally, this self-substantial element is overshadowed by practical needs, no less than by the use of language as an instrument of external, non-intimate knowledge. Yet, in the measure in which it is called

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

back to its perennial source, language is immediately a rediscovery of it—a *knowing while actuating*—and shares in the light, and power, and rhythm, and mystery, of thought's original reality. It is rightly described as 'Orphic', in accordance with the various meanings of this word.

15 *Images* When a poem, or a fragment of it, is beautiful as an image, and only as an image (or may be said to be outstandingly such) so much the more it may draw our attention, in these pages, for it would seem not to confirm our main contention, but rather to be at variance with it. Let us quote the following fragment (the 'mountains' referred to are the Euganean Hills)

were seen  
Those mountains towering as from waves of flame  
Around the vaporous sun, from which there came  
The inmost purple spirit of light,  
*Julian and Maddalo, 81.*

It seems that the mere fact of making a landscape visible by means of a few words, is sufficient to create a new thing, a thing of beauty. What is this flash of the vision? Certainly it is not mere plastic power. Plastic power, in itself alone, could affect us as curious, as surprising, perhaps as miraculous. Beauty is quite a different thing. *Actualization*, on the other hand, is in this connection a more adequate word: it conveys the meaning of an intimate and original value. However, in order to be such a value, and to constitute beauty, actualization must be *spirit*. That is to say, in actualization *creative freedom* must be felt—its deep, actual infinity and its rich simplicity. It is because of thought's silent power that 'forms' in art are 'more real than living man' (*Prometheus Unbound*, I, 748). Indeed original life is found, if ever, in 'living man', but in artistic expression—even confined to 'mere images', if such exist—the formative principle is manifest and therefore real in its intrinsic and eternal character, as it is not, generally, in practical life.

In rendering a landscape by means of colours, the lack of transformation into spiritual or subjective values may not, to a certain extent, prevent the work from being done. A painting

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

then looks superficial we do not see in it the silent power of thought, intimate, transparent—more real than things in their objective multiplicity and above all more real than symbolized abstract ideas We may say that in rendering a landscape into words this *more real* element is inevitable and is always implied—so much so that it often passes unobserved

16 Let us now follow in Shelley's poetry a more explicit thought concerning the nature of reality at large, sometimes of a more markedly inferential character

I have heard  
By mine own heart this joyous truth averred  
The spirit of the worm beneath the sod  
In love and worship, blends itself with God

*Epipsychidion*, 126

The universality of love's principle is declared, it is intimately felt and forcibly expressed as love—and interest and pity towards inferior or weaker living beings—and, at one and the same time, as a *discovery*, an actually self-revealing principle The implication of universality, in the passage quoted, seems to depend immediately on the strength of the principle itself, inasmuch as it is felt as supremely real, *original*, though, we may assume, it is also suggested or confirmed, with some qualifications, by the view of the external world

Many a philosopher conceives, or seems to conceive, that spirit begins with man, nay, with grown-up man, nay, with man when he is sober and in full possession of his faculties, nay, with the philosopher, nay, with himself Shelley upholds, most forcibly, and rightly, the opposite view

It is worth while noticing that the fact of recognizing one and the same reality (which we know in our own life) in its lower forms, and most remote from us, is quite a different thing from explaining the highest forms in terms of the lowest, or from deriving the higher from the lower and, in some sense, simpler forms In the second case, or way of approach, we ignore or crudely (generally uncritically) deny the existence of an original

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

principle which can be better known and investigated from an intimate point of view and in its highest expressions There is, besides, a third fundamental method of interpretation that of envisaging a principle *qua* original and irreducible, and claiming to explain it while assuming—generally in a more or less surreptitious way—its beginning at a certain stage of evolution or development, and while postulating quite heterogeneous degrees of reality This seems to me the most unwarranted, and least scientific, methodological standpoint Both this idealistic emergentism, as we may call it, and that total derivationism, are implicitly rejected in the above-quoted passage

On the other hand, the more we advance in our knowledge of life and nature, the more (I do not doubt) we become convinced that to start from the assumption or the hypothesis that life, in its fundamental characteristics, belongs to man exclusively is a quite arbitrary standpoint The *onus probandi* would lie on him, who starts from so, to all appearance, extremely superficial and most improbable a point of view It would be therefore quite out of place to tax Shelley's conviction with 'anthropomorphism' Nothing could be farther from his trend of thought

It is through a perpetual *re-creation* that love's principle exerts its power, or exists at all This is not stated in the following extract, yet some words in it may in this concept have their source

All things are recreated, and the flame  
Of consentaneous love inspires all life .

*The Daemon of the World*, 343

17 The common and essentially subjective principle, all through

    The sensitive extension of the world,  
                                    *Queen Mab*, VI, 231

is quite unequivocally described as the only reality

Nought is but that which feels itself to be  
                                    *Hellas*, 785

Its presence both in the animal and vegetable world is often implied, or vividly represented

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

All baser things pant with life's sacred thirst,

*Adonais*, 169

Compare *The Sensitive Plant*, *passim*, e.g., v 7

18 But the idea of one common *active* principle, underlying or, indeed, constituting reality, extends in Shelley's thought also to include what we would call inanimate, physical things

Throughout this varied and eternal world  
Soul is the only element the block  
That for uncounted ages has remained  
The moveless pillar of a mountain's weight  
Is active, living spirit Every grain  
Is sentient both in unity and part,  
And the minutest atom comprehends  
A world of loves and hatreds, these beget  
Evil and good hence truth and falsehood spring,  
Hence will and thought and action, all the germs  
Of pain or pleasure, sympathy or hate,  
That variegates the eternal universe

*Queen Mab*, IV, 139

Ye elemental Genii, who have homes  
From man's high mind even to the central stone  
Of sullen lead,

*Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 539<sup>1</sup>

Poetical insight cannot make a great contribution to the subject and to the solution of the problems involved, yet it is not altogether incompetent and meaningless in respect of them

The idea, that in the core of matter there lies *subjectivity*, is not an entirely gratuitous hypothesis. It seems that matter ought to become pulverized *ad infinitum*, unless we suppose in it something self-consistent, self-maintaining and inwardly purposive, self-recuperating, wanting to be, affording a principle of unity. And indeed, this argument comes still within the competence of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 370 ('It interpenetrates my granite mass'), *Alastor*, I, *Adonais*, 370

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

poetic insight Again, if we do not admit in the ultimate nature of matter a principle of self-activity, which implies, in some degree, inward purposiveness and sentiency—however hard that may be to conceive—it is, on the other hand, difficult to understand how so radically heterogeneous a quality may arise at a given moment from a world of mere objective *existents* And here, also, the full appreciation of this difficulty is not unrelated to poetic insight

The effort of many a physicist, his attempt to suppose something common both to physical and subjective indeterminacy, reflects the same logical need and is, from this point of view, quite understandable Yet, in this connection, it must be pointed out that physical indeterminacy is conceived by physicists as fortuitousness, and there is nothing in it to suggest *tension*—not ‘tension’ in the meaning in which this word is used in mechanics and physics, but inward tension, implying *unity*, the many-in-one Indeed physicists like to speak of the ‘life’ of matter, precisely when they are most plunged in their researches, in face of the fervid richness and unforeseen character of the events which they investigate Yet I do not think that, up to now at least, the bringing together of the two concepts is justified, or likely to be true And, for instance, the fact that electrons are perfectly identical with each other—as is stated, and so far as is known—seems to exclude in matter anything like spontaneity or creative indeterminacy

It must further be noticed that Shelley does not imply that there may not be, in the physical atom, also an irreducible material element, characterized by relations of external conditionality and passivity

19 A kind of dualism between spirit and matter seems to be admitted in the following passage

There was the Heaven and Earth at first,  
And Light and Love

*Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 32

‘The Heaven’, I suppose, may stand here for space, and ‘Earth’ for matter ‘Light’ and ‘Love’, on the other hand, are essentially

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

kindred 'Light' is no mere physical light, and, as the very principle of form, in its deep intrinsicity, it merges into a value of universality, which is akin with love's Shelley is aware of this kinship He points to it explicitly (cf *Epipsychidion*, 336 'When light is changed to love,     ', see also *Prometheus Unbound*, II, v, 40)

In the same scene of the 'Prometheus Unbound', Demogorgon eventually states that Love is the supreme power in the universe

For what would it avail  
to bid speak  
Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change? To these  
All things are subject but eternal Love  
*Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 117

20 On Serchio's stream at the first morning ray, birds and  
men and every living thing,

All rose to do the task He set to each,  
 Who shaped us to His ends and not our own,  
*The Boat on the Serchio, 30*

Ofentimes Shelley's thought keeps wandering about such subjects and trying widely to guess, he says,

The issue of the earth's great business,  
*Letter to Maria Gisborne, 163*

His reasoned hope is that spirit will eventually prevail in this world of ours, and it is in creative thought as manifest in the forms of art that he sees a specimen, or a suggestion, of what life is bound to become, if it follows its deepest impulse. For in artistic or poetical expression, life itself is present and manifest in its very principle, and reveals itself in its intrinsic and universal value. No horrid conflicts exist between thought's different moments or realizations, they are perpetually self-renouncing, all-absorbing, all-transparent, highly comprehensive, they appear infused with love's very spirit (see above, § 10). He foreshadows in some of the last lines of the 'Prometheus Unbound' the even-

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

tual triumph of what he feels to be deepest and strongest in freedom's very nature—that is to say, love itself

Love,  
from the last giddy hour  
Of dread endurance,  
springs  
And folds over the world its healing wings  
*Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 557, 560

In his early poem, 'The Daemon of the World', he imagines such conditions realized Speaking of man in that stage of evolution, he says

no longer now  
He slays the beast that sports around his dwelling  
And horribly devours its mangled flesh,  
*The Daemon of the World*, 443

The like state of existence is imagined as made real in the happy isle which he describes in the 'Epipsychidion' (cf 1 533)

The view of Shelley may seem to some people not to satisfy the highest claim for truth But, let us throw this into relief, *form exclusive*, and cruelty, are in fact the weakest power (besides being felt as the lowest) in life's creative element—which is the most real thing we know And the urge towards the ideal world depicted by Shelley lies ineradicably in cruel nature itself

21 Evil spirits themselves obey a power which transcends them—not a power of evil Compare the lines

Therefore from nature's inner shrine,  
Where gods and fiends in worship bend,  
*The Daemon of the World*, 96

The 'tiger joy' may be charmed (*Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 501)

The furies themselves do not lack the notion of pity, if it helps them they ask for pity, while exerting their cruelty, in order to be allowed the evil deed (*Id*, I, 350)

Can evil, felt as evil, rejoice in itself—in so far as and because



PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

it is ultimately felt as evil? Yes, it can. The denial of the spirit is in this way represented as an original force and voluptuousness, real in itself, self-sufficing, and so much the more repellent

Can aught exult in its deformity?

*Prometheus Unbound*, I, 464

Absolute evil is, on more than one occasion, represented in 'Custom' (cf *The Revolt of Islam*, 419) and in 'power' (relentless political power, cf *The Cenci*, IV, 1v, 178)

The evil man is represented as 'cruel, cold, formal' (*Id*, V, 1v, 108), 'a coward to the strong', 'a tyrant to the weak' (*Rosalind and Helen*, 254)

Hardness of heart—the uncomprehensive attitude of mind, as regards original values—is keenly felt as the most general evil. Men are 'deaf', yet not so completely as to be irresponsible for it (cf *Epipsychidion*, 8)

22 A clear statement upholding value's *immanent* nature and origin is contained in the following passage

'Tis an assurance that this Earth is Heaven,  
And Heaven the flower of that untainted seed  
Which springeth here beneath such love as ours

*Juvenilia To Harriet*, 21

It is not God ('Heaven') that explains value, it is value, as it is known in this life of ours, that makes understandable, and likely, the existence of other and higher forms of value itself

Nature's toilsome labour is represented as justified and rewarded in its creations

The fertile bosom of the earth gives suck  
To myriads, who still grow beneath her care,  
Rewarding her with their pure perfectness,

*The Daemon of the World*, 345,  
*Queen Mab*, VII, 109

The concept of an immanent purposiveness in nature is here admirably expressed. Let us notice that the word 'perfection', had

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

it been used instead of 'perfectness', would have failed to express so happily the concept and value of the formative principle in its indeterminate and active character, radical and universal, and spiritually concrete 'Perfection'—though even a name for 'entelechy'—may easily convey the idea of an abstract entity, cut off from its very principle, 'like a stream cut off from its sources' (to use Meredith's words<sup>1</sup>)

When growth and the fervid moment of creative indeterminacy are conceived as highly representative of value, then an immanent interpretation of it seems to be implied, for then it would seem to be implied—and felt—that *becoming* and history belong to its very nature. Now Shelley constantly puts into prominence the reality, power and value of life in its budding, in its disclosing, ever-new, ever-initial, an *opening*, widely inclusive and full of promise. Compare *To a Skylark*, 5, 15, 60, *Epipsychidion*, 120, *Prometheus Unbound*, III, iii, 38, see above, § 6

The following passages may also be quoted, pointing to an immanent interpretation

The sweetest flowers are ever frail and rare,  
And love and freedom blossom but to wither  
*Marenghi*, 47

the intense atom glows  
A moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose  
*Adonais*, 179

The Future and the Past are idle shadows  
Of thought's eternal flight—they have no being  
*Hellas*, 783

The *present* decides about, and bears within itself, the reality of the universe at any given moment. Quite different is the idea of past and future as existing (and in so far denied as past and future) in a supposed 'eternal present'. This indeed would imply the failure of all our conceptions about value as witnessing something really, originally active, and of all our conceptions about history and evolution as being not a mere deceiving appearance. But till the emphasis is laid on this 'eternal flight'—and on the

<sup>1</sup> *Poetical Works*, 'France', VII

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

'ever new' (*Prometheus Unbound*, III, 111, 38)—the ever-renewing moment and form seem to be conceived as co-essential with value

In a different respect, an immanent conception is asserted in such a view about human destiny, as considered above, § 20 Cf also *The Daemon of the World*, 292, 295

23 On the other hand we find, in Shelley's poetry, passages which seem to point to a transcendent interpretation of the nature of value

Must that divinest form,  
Which love and admiration cannot view  
decay?

*The Daemon of the World*, 12, 17

Why aught should fail and fade that once is shown  
*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, 20

But look on that which cannot change—the One,  
The unborn and the undying  
*Hellas*, 768

Compare also *The Sensitive Plant*, III, 134 These expressions may simply represent an attempt to convey the idea of a self-caused or uncaused (non-extrinsically caused) principle—and not that of an immobile entity—and may not be of great significance in the present connection But there are other passages which seem to assert more forcibly, and from a more intimate point of view, a divorce between life and, on the other hand, whatever is meant as the supreme value and the supreme reality

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,  
*Adonais*, 462.

That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse  
Of birth can quench not,  
*Id*, 480.

Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,  
Remote, serene, and inaccessible  
*Mont Blanc*, 96

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

This thought, in the passage last quoted, seems however to call up in Shelley's mind itself a different one, which interprets and corrects it, and with which the poem closes ('thou' refers to 'Mont Blanc' )

And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,  
If to the human mind's imaginings  
Silence and solitude were vacancy?

*Id.*, 142

More significant seems to me the following questioning—even if an affirmative answer is expected or implied in it

in life and truth  
Might not my heart its cravings ever slake?  
*The Revolt of Islam*, 1446<sup>1</sup>

Indeed Shelley strongly feels the limitations of life and of thought itself. And doubts and tentative presentments of opposite views are inevitable and fruitful. Again, it is not easy to withstand the temptation of symbolizing an infinitely impersonal value (and one so strongly felt as such!) as existing, beyond life and thought, in a quite heterogeneous sphere of reality. But it would be entirely misleading to conceive, for instance, the above-quoted passages from 'Adonais' (vv 462, 480) and 'Mont Blanc' (v 96) as eminently representative of Shelley's thought. Shelley strives to vindicate life, and the name of it, to its highest meaning, he does not forswear it. He is the avenger of *life and truth* (an intimate and not pragmatically conceived truth) as one and the same reality. He is from this as from other points of view in full agreement—though not looked for—with the philosophy of the Gospels. He is, in this respect, as far as one could possibly be from Buddhism. Spirit is for him life itself, life in what he thinks to be its true meaning, not a distinct transcendent principle. He sings 'passion's golden purity', his last poem is 'The Triumph of Life', and the first one, in his *Works*, 'The Daemon of the World'. Through all his poems, he finds *spirit* while deepening life's very essence.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also *Adonais*, 339, 344, 356, *The Revolt of Islam*, 2640, *Mutability* (*Early Poems*), 1, *The Zucca*, 23, 28, 17-24.

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

It is only when we overlook the fact that infinity and eternity, as values, are inherent in anything that is in a high degree *active* and belong to the very principle of life, that we may be led to interpret form-transcendancy, and all kindred values, in Shelley's poetry, as negative of life itself

24 Nevertheless, just because Shelley knows, as no one else, value as immanent, his doubts, however fugitive, about an immanent interpretation of it are worth meditation

I must here state, as briefly and as clearly as possible, my own conviction on the subject I hold that the highest values themselves entirely depend on the essentially new moment of thought's activity, that, for instance, *eternity*, as a value, is but a *character* of the ever-originating unity and has no separate existence This on many grounds, which I recapitulate

(1) Form-in-the-making (that is to say, *novelty*) is essential to value

(2) No universality of principle can be understood, unless it is conceived as a vital, *active*, relation with form—as an over-coming of given forms and limits, and, therefore, as novelty <sup>1</sup>

All philosophy which misses this point, conceives of universality as the attribute of rigid laws And if it tries to spare a place for freedom, it does it hopelessly, while postulating a mixture of sheer necessity *and* fortuitousness—which has nothing to do with freedom, effort and value It gets entangled in a labyrinth of errors, fails to grasp mental reality and life, and eventually confesses or professes life's non-intelligibility

(3) We may suppose that in any form of existence whatever, and in the lowest forms of life, value has no less intensity than, e g, in Shelley's poems but whatever makes us wonder at value, as supreme and transcendent, seems to be largely dependent on *history* The very value of infinity, and universality, and absoluteness, seems every day to be—and from immemorial ages to have been—enhanced and enriched *through specifications and reconciliations, through failures and atonements* Earthly processes are not there to welcome a reality which comes intact, or only obscured and deformed, from other spheres they are essentially contri-

<sup>1</sup> See above, § 6

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

butive just in that which makes value most perplexing, or awe-inspiring

(4) A timeless reality does not explain value. Such reality would be quite heterogeneous from it. As for myself, I must confess, I cannot conceive a timeless reality except as a reality which has no becoming and is static.

(5) The argument that change, in order to be known, presupposes in the last analysis an absolute changeless element, is in my opinion of little worth, and not decisive. The synthesis of thought, in which successive moments are known as such, is immediately and in itself subjective time. Moreover, the experience of time (from an intimate point of view) does not primarily depend on the perception or sense of change, but on its *positive* character.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand it is hard to conceive this principle of unity and creativeness, of which I am speaking, as contained in novelty—suspended, as it were, on novelty, on the flight of the ever-originating present. It is difficult to conceive the why of its constant characterization, of its perennial identity, if this identity is not postulated as a changeless self-existing entity. Besides, the problem of the first beginning of an ever-original spiritual or mental principle, that is to say, the problem of the first beginning of subjectivity, once it is not derived from matter, is most perplexing. To conceive *matter* as existent from endless time is easier, or to conceive as such the Unknowable, or to drop time altogether as a created category, not belonging to the essential nature of God.

The problem is vast and intricate. Also the effort to explain value through second causes had to be made. All the last century hopefully devoted its ingenuities to this task, yet with meagre result.

But he only, who has laid bare the nature of the creative essence, of the 'intense atom', who has known and *loved* this burning element to such a degree of intensity and depth as Shelley did, is entitled to doubt whether it is sufficient to explain itself. And let us also point out that it is then that the subjective foundation of the religious problem is at last brought into sight. The

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Il concetto dell'indeterminazione*, §§ 32, 33

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

problem of religion, from an introspective and critical point of view, arises only when the claims of an original immanent principle, especially with reference to value, have been recognized

Shelley vindicates creative Form, and its implied concepts, in its original, ever-new value. Therefore his dissatisfaction, which now and then appears, with creative Form itself—and with life and thought—obliges us to ask ourselves if the Infinite be not something more than an aspect of freedom—something more than the original, and primal, and eternal *character* of the formative principle itself

25 Shelley conceives life's radical aspects, which perpetually disclose its creative essence, as *real*. He conceives them as implying, directly or indirectly, all the problems of spirit and nature. And nobody is in closer contact with those aspects or this essence. No wonder, then, if he considers himself—and the Poet in general—as a researcher, and poetry, as highly contributive to knowledge. He expresses his conviction frequently (cf., e.g., *Alastor*, 22, 37), and, in more general terms, his view is implied when he calls science and poetry 'sisters' ('And Science, and her sister Poesy, . . .', *The Revolt of Islam*, 2255)

To maintain that his conviction depends on his incompetence concerning the meaning and methods of knowledge, or on a kind of self-delusion, would be absurd.<sup>1</sup>

26 *Ode to the West Wind* (1819) It is not only through obvious material associations that the poem almost begins with the image of scattered autumnal leaves,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,  
Pestilence-stricken multitudes

*Ode to the West Wind*, 4

The colours of the spring seem to be essentially connected with the moment of birth, of the first coming into being, as we may inwardly imagine it—revealing tenderness and grace, and, in each gem and bud, absolute faith, and newness, and innocence

<sup>1</sup> See on this subject, Chapter IX, §§ 15, 16

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

But the beauty of autumn seems to be scarcely related to the processes by which it is determined or conditioned. There is something almost uncanny in it, something non-human and even heterogeneous from life. Hence, as it seems, through a spontaneous, deep kinship of concepts, the image anticipates in some way the ode, and fits in with its grandeur.

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion  
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,

*Id*, 15

Self-surrender, through which everything is lost, and renewed, and identified with that power (the 'wind') is here the *essential* moment expressed. We begin to be aware that the 'Wind' is spirit itself—or a medium to its expression.

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams  
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,  
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,

*Id*, 29

Is the Mediterranean here depicted, or is it rather a means to express thought's elemental qualities? For that by which we are here allured and enlightened is thought's very transparency, rediscovered in and through the 'object', and the element of form, however light it may be (cf. the 'coil' of the sea's 'crystalline streams') which is essential to the reality of thought itself and shares in that transparency. It may be objected that Shelley was unaware that thought's reality had anything to do with the 'coil' and the 'crystalline streams' of the sea. I maintain that consciousness of this is not entirely lacking either in the poet, or in the reader. In so far as Shelley is concerned, the following passage, not belonging to the same poem, would seem to support my contention. The relation between the crystalline sea and thought is here more apparent, and intentional.

But Greece and her foundations are  
Built below the tide of war,  
Based on the crystalline sea  
Of thought and its eternity,

*Hellas*, 696



## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

The above question reflects a problem which is always an open one in all arts—except in music and (in certain respects) in architecture. This is the problem, or rather the *riddle* of the represented 'object'—which in itself, on the one hand, appears to be but a pretext, or an occasion, or a fecund medium, and yet, on the other hand, must be aimed at and loved in and for itself, otherwise thought's very power and all grace is forfeited.

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear,  
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee,  
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even  
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,  
*Ode to the West Wind*, 43

Obviously, the personification of the West Wind would be impossible—or extremely fictitious and disturbing—were not the 'object' (the 'West Wind') merged in the spiritual reality it embodies. I would limit myself to pointing out here only one aspect of this reality, as expressed in the passage above quoted—that of dauntlessness (to use one of Shelley's words).

Self-oblivion, self-surrender, pity and tenderness, and all forms of one's identification with the active principle in its intrinsic or *eternal* nature, may seem in Shelley's poetry to efface, in some respects, individuality. He, in his own words, is 'of hearts the weakest'

When a voice said 'O thou of hearts the weakest, '  
*Epipsychidion*, 232

What is there in Shelley that compensates or counteracts this (if spirit's harmony and reality must be restored)? It is not *pride*. It is not the *will* in the narrower sense of the word. It is not *control over thought*. I think that in this connection (in Shelley's poetry) the outstanding and characteristic factors are dauntlessness and disdain. As for *disdain*, let us quote (as demonstrating a particular shade of it) the following passage

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

There is the wisdom of a stern content  
When Poverty can blight the just and good,  
When Infamy dares mock the innocent,  
And cherished friends turn with the multitude  
To trample this was ours, and we unshaken stood'  
*The Revolt of Islam*, 68

'The dauntless and the good' (cf *The Daemon of the World*, 314) seems to resume, and may be taken as symbolizing, the twofold aspect of value. Compare the following fragments

From hate and awe thy heart is free,  
Ardent and pure as day thou burnest,  
*The Daemon of the World*, 91

For none than he a purer heart could have,  
Or that loved good more for itself alone,  
Of nought in heaven or earth was he the slave  
*Prince Athanase*, 16

Cf also *The Revolt of Islam*, 710, 951, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV, 572-3. The West Wind is 'uncontrollable', 'wild', 'fierce'. In another passage of the Ode, a few lines further on, the concept-value I am referring to is even more distinctly expressed

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed  
One too like thee tameless, and swift, and proud  
*Ode to the West Wind*, 55

Shelley explicitly calls the West Wind 'Spirit', a 'wild Spirit', which is 'moving everywhere' (l. 13). Cf also ll. 61-2 (quoted in the following passage). But this does not, or might not, mean very much, and 'spirit' and 'wind' are terms which possess an old common history. What matters is that the actual and yet self-transcending *cause* of life is real, and felt, and known, in the image of the Wind. The 'Ode to the West Wind' sounds now as an invocation, now as a prayer—and this, again, would appear awkward, or fictitious, if that *reality* were not actually present.

Here are the last lines of the Ode

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!  
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!  
And, by the incantation of this verse,  
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawakened earth  
The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?  
*Id*, 61

May I draw attention to two concepts especially, which are most contributive to the meaning and poetical power of this passage

A value of universality (which indeed inspires all Shelley's poetry) is here expressed, that finds in the image of the Wind a particularly apt means of expression. This image may convey a sense of self-transcendancy and universality in many ways, but I would confine myself to emphasizing the following Dissatisfaction with anything particularly local, and national, and human, a sense of homelessness, the wish for an endless wandering, these feelings may be suggested by the image of the Wind. We may understand that Shelley found in the West Wind a fit medium of expression, which his very soul was seeking for. Let us refer to other poems. He likes to speak of 'homeless streams' (*Alastor*, 566), of that which 'cannot make abode' (*The Revolt of Islam*, 4759), of man 'unclassed, tribeless, and nationless' (*Prometheus Unbound*, III, iv, 195) 'The Aziola', also, I could hardly refrain from quoting in this connection—where he humorously says

How elate  
I felt to know that it was nothing human,  
No mockery of myself to fear or hate  
*The Aziola*, 7

Yet his heart is with mankind, and in the righteousness of his

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

deepest claims, and above all in the original reality with which he is now in close contact, in the *felt* eternity, and universality, of a principle of inviolate freedom, he knows, he seeks, a power of prophecy. The actual cause itself is, in fact, embodied in the 'Wind', 'uncontrollable', 'awaking', transparent and (in a sense) unattainable, simple, inviolable and most powerful. The actual cause is, on the other hand, immediately and essentially forging the temporal direction and, let us say, forward looking, stretching into the future, moreover, it is 'the key of truths', and primal, i.e., self-characterizing *ad infinitum*. Hence, I think, the immediate feeling of a 'prophetic' character in it (see § 8).

With reference to the last line of the passage quoted, cf. § 9 (last paragraph but one)

✓ 27 *To a Skylark* (1820)

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!

Bird thou never wert,

That from Heaven, or near it,

Pourest thy full heart

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art

*To a Skylark, 1*

'Unpremeditated', as here the word is used, not only conveys the feeling and the meaning of the creative and deeply new moment, self-imposing, intrinsically characterized (cf. Chapter II, § 2), it also expresses in a distinctly high degree a temporal direction, a joyous and glorious opening of the gates of the future, and, again, it emphasizes the holocaust of the self (cf. 'Pourest thy full heart') in the essentially new act, and it seems to show that the latter's rich and wide content (cf. 'In profuse strains') depends just on this newness.

Higher still and higher

From the earth thou springest

Like a cloud of fire,

The blue deep thou wingest,

And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest

*Id., 6*

Indeed, height, and light, and song, and the glory of thought in

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

the visioned infinity of its bright original power, are here one identical reality (cf Chapter I, § 1, last paragraph) yet each word carries its own problem, which is felt as a distinct reality and, in some sense, a distinct mystery. Why is *height* a radical, essential value of mental reality? Why does the feeling of *height* exist at all? We may try to explain *height* pragmatically, with reference to aeons of experiences of power and freedom, but these, so far as we can conceive, would presuppose such value, or such urge, and the attempt would be but to explain away the problem. 'Height' is the last name—the last standard—for our moral judgement, and for the poet's inspiration. In the manifold aspect of original causality, *height* is a non-deducible element. It points to a primal urge for intellectual life. It seems a *cause* in history and evolution, and not only the outcome of it. It constitutes a burning problem, hence, in part, the actuality and power of the poem.

In the golden lightning  
Of the sunken sun,  
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,  
Thou dost float and run,  
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun

*Id*, 11

In the last line of the stanza, the first and most intense initial moment—in the essentially ever-initial *activity*—is pointed out as the most significant (cf above, §§ 6 and 22)

The pale purple even  
Melts around thy flight,  
Like a star of Heaven  
In the broad daylight  
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight,

*Id*, 16

'Unseen' cf further on, vv 46 ff, and above, § 3

All the earth and air  
With thy voice is loud,  
As, when night is bare,  
From one lonely cloud

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

The moon rains out her beams, and Heaven is over-  
flowed

*Id*, 26

Fullness of form and infinitude are here expressed in all their power and indistinguishably blended, form is here as wide as infinitude, and infinitude itself is form (see above, § 8, last paragraph)

What thou art we know not,  
What is most like thee?  
From rainbow clouds there flow not  
Drops so bright to see  
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody

Like a Poet hidden  
In the light of thought,  
Singing hymns unbidden,  
Till the world is wrought  
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not

*Id*, 31

The concept expressed in the second of the two stanzas last quoted consists in two parts (1) Creative thought overshadows the separate self The poet is absorbed by it, he is identified with it His past, his organism, his very life are but a *medium*—a fertile *medium* for an ever-new, exacting actuality (2) The *Word*—the actual cause—carries within itself a seed of truths, an harmonious richness, which cannot be entirely absent, wherever a beginning of consciousness is found, and which can be awakened, or—if means of expression and other conditions are not wildly different—it seems impossible that it should not be awakened Original causality is here powerfully felt and asserted in its self-transcending character (cf 'a Poet hidden') and in its essential novelty (cf 'hymns unbidden'), but above all, owing, as I maintain, to its deep intrinsic character, a universal and almost prophetic quality in it is realized It is perhaps from the consciousness of poetic reality, as expressed in this stanza, that Shelley drew first his inspiration for the whole poem (cf vv 101-5, quoted further on, with ll 39-40 in this stanza)

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Like a glow-worm golden  
In a dell of dew,  
Scattering unbeholden  
Its aereal hue  
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from  
the view!

Like a rose embowered  
In its own green leaves,  
By warm winds deflowered,  
Till the scent it gives  
Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-  
wingèd thieves

*Id* , 46

Shelley seems to search here—yet as one who only looks after beauty!—for a high and still higher degree of indeterminacy. This is a positive value, a value in itself. It is elicited, enhanced, by every word and image. Invisibility, secretness and intimacy, which we here find expressed, are in fact essential aspects of indeterminacy—and of creative novelty.

Sound of vernal showers  
On the twinkling grass,  
Rain-awakened flowers,  
All that ever was  
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth  
surpass

*Id* , 56

With reference to these lines and to the concept of novelty, cf §§ 6 and 22. It may be also emphasized that, especially, the words 'Joyous, and clear, and fresh', as used here, reflect and witness a deep ontological reality, and depth of thought, but that they are lost, precisely in their poetical value, for anyone who, through pseudo-scientific preconceptions, makes himself deaf to any sense of the creative element in which they have their force and significance.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Chorus Hymeneal,  
Or triumphal chant,  
Matched with thine would be all  
But an empty vaunt,  
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want

What objects are the fountains  
Of thy happy strain?  
What fields, or waves, or mountains?  
What shapes of sky or plain?  
What love of thine own kind? what ignorance  
Of pain?

With thy clear keen joyance  
Languor cannot be  
Shadow of annoyance  
Never came near thee  
Thou lovest—but ne'er knew love's sad satiety

Waking or asleep,  
Thou of death must deem  
Things more true and deep  
Than we mortals dream,  
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal  
stream?

*Id*, 66

Is the creative element to such a degree identified with the song's perpetual novelty—with the summit of the living present—that no shade of the past ever touches it? Or is it so deeply and powerfully identified with the intrinsic and eternal character of its very principle and essence, that this *character* becomes the only existing reality, and individual death is made insignificant? Or, again, are there transcendental explanations of that joy, which are entirely unknown to us? Shelley says that

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest  
thought.

*Id*, 90.



## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Indeed sorrow calls for pity and for love or, more in general, for the vindication, and present reality, of the spirit—through its denial. But the 'Bird' does not need this. It does not feel this, and yet its song attains greater height than ours. Obliviousness and ignorance are but negative values, and yet the bird's song soars higher than anything of ours. It must not be really oblivion, or ignorance, which sustains it, but truth. Shelley's question is not idle, because the 'key of truths' (cf. § 4) lies there—in the song. The criterion of truth lies in the height, in that supreme reality which Shelley sees and hears and which inspires him in these lines. He does not believe that it can deceive us. And this conviction of his can probably be taken as the test of his identification with the spirit and of the intensity of his inspiration.

However this may be, a more definite truth becomes now apparent. That 'keen joyance' is the unconquerable *formative* power (the actual cause), the quintessence of it. And, could we only learn 'half' of that 'gladness', the truth for which we stand on this earth would be so powerfully recreated and interpreted in and through it, that all men's unwillingness to hear should be conquered.

Teach me half the gladness  
That thy brain must know,  
Such harmonious madness  
From my lips would flow  
The world should listen then—as I am listening now  
*Id.*, 101

28 *Epipsychidion* (1821) I have drawn from the 'Epipsychidion' many of the passages quoted in the preceding pages. Here I shall select only a few, which refer especially to woman—as the object, so to say, in which spirit now is discovered by Shelley or revealed to him. Yet I leave aside the most relevant aspect of his discovery, namely, that profound Oneness with the beloved being—implying annihilation and renewal—to which already attention has been called (see above, § 1).

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,  
Veil'd beneath that radiant form of Woman

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

All that is insupportable in thee  
Of light, and love, and immortality!

*Epipsychidion*, 21.

The image is again suggested and constituted by the essential interplay between form and, on the other hand, the very principle of form—in its original, universal and eternal character (distinctly signified by ‘light’, ‘love’, and ‘immortality’) Form (cf ‘that radiant form of Woman’) is eclipsed, but to such a degree of intensity, that we may doubt whether or not this transitory form represents the full reality of the principle itself. The image may remind us of that one in which Shelley says that life ‘stains’ (not as here ‘veils’) the ‘white radiance of Eternity’ (see § 23). But here the ‘white radiance of Eternity’ is not supposed to lie outside the beloved being itself. These concepts make up the warp and woof of Shelley’s imagery—and, indeed, neither a transcendent nor an immanent view need be implied! This, however, does not mean that they have here no ontological significance. Here as elsewhere, in fact, they are most significant and revealing, in so far as thought’s—and life’s—irreplaceable and inimitable tissue is concerned.

Sweet Benediction in the eternal Curse!

*Id*, 25

Cf above, § 23, and the passage there quoted, *Adonais*, 480

Thou Wonder, and thou Beauty, and thou Terror!

*Id*, 29

He attempts to find images most like his beloved, and it is worth while noticing that they are the more powerful (as I would think) the more directly they elicit essential aspects of the original reality we are considering.

A Solitude, a Refuge, a Delight

*Id*, 64

A cradle of young thoughts of wingless pleasure

*Id*, 68

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

A Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning

*Id*, 120

Cf §§ 12 and 22

Her Spirit was the harmony of truth

*Id*, 216

Cf § 4

the brightness  
Of her divinest presence trembles through  
Her limbs, as underneath a cloud of dew  
Amid the splendour-wingèd stars, the Moon  
Burns, inextinguishably beautiful

*Id*, 77, 81

Cf §§ 3 and 8 (last paragraph)

As happens to many a man, from his first youth Shelley longs for an ideal and fully incarnate Form, in whom to find consent, his highest standard of values confirmed and the best of his soul made real and tangible, in whom to know, above all, that awful Simplicity, which cannot be known except in its self-revealing actuality, love, comparable only—in its infinitude—to Death

There was a Being whom my spirit oft  
Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft,  
In the clear golden prime of my youth's dawn,

*Id*, 190

The *active* principle, in love's passion as in art, is omnipresent, this original power calls from everywhere, lies in every object

In solitudes  
Her voice came to me through the whispering woods,  
And from the singing of the summer-birds,  
And from all sounds, all silence

*Id*, 200, 208

Eventually,

She met me, Stranger, upon life's rough way,

*Id*, 72

And called my Spirit, and the dreaming clay  
Was lifted by the thing that dreamed below

*Id*, 338

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

and in her beauty's glow  
I stood, and felt the dawn of my long night  
Was penetrating me with living light

*Id*, 340

✓<sub>29</sub> *To Jane, The Recollection* (1822) Inviolable quietness, presence infinite, silence, are suggested in the following lines and actually expressed, not only, but most especially, through the *absence* of wind and tempest, which are represented in their *possibility*—an allusion being made to their secret 'nest' and 'home' The 'hour'—a most indeterminate noun—'from beyond the sky' conveys the sense of an even wider and purer presence

We wandered to the Pine Forest  
That skirts the Ocean's foam,  
The lightest wind was in its nest,  
The tempest in its home  
The whispering waves were half asleep,  
The clouds were gone to play,  
And on the bosom of the deep  
The smile of Heaven lay,  
It seemed as if the hour were one  
Sent from beyond the skies,  
Which scattered from above the sun  
A light of Paradise

*To Jane, The Recollection*, 9

The 'inviolable quietness' (cf l 37) is again expressed by the image which immediately follows in the poem The 'pines' are powerfully sculptured while being compared with 'serpents interlaced' 'Storms' and 'serpents' suggest movement The idea of it is not entirely absent and makes the immobility of the trees, our thought of it, *actively* and perpetually real

We paused amid the pines that stood  
The giants of the waste,  
Tortured by storms to shapes as rude  
As serpents interlaced,

*Id*, 21

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Now all the tree-tops lay asleep,  
Like green waves on the sea,  
As still as in the silent deep  
The ocean woods may be

*Id* , 29

There seemed from the remotest seat  
Of the white mountain waste,  
To the soft flower beneath our feet,  
A magic circle traced,—  
A spirit interfused around,  
A thrilling, silent life,  
To momentary peace it bound  
Our mortal nature's strife,

*Id* , 41

‘A thrilling, silent life’ in the first draft Shelley had written ‘A thinking, silent life’ This may indicate how distinctly Shelley understood and felt as a reality of thought, or sharing in thought’s nature, the present value of eternity which is expressed in the poem (He replaced the word ‘thinking’ perhaps only because the expression ‘thinking life’ would sound rather crude—as it is presented )

We paused beside the pools that lie  
Under the forest bough,—  
Each seemed as ’twere a little sky  
Gulfed in a world below,  
A firmament of purple light  
Which in the dark earth lay,  
More boundless than the depth of night,  
And purer than the day—  
In which the lovely forests grew,  
As in the upper air,  
More perfect both in shape and hue  
Than any spreading there

. . . . .

Sweet views which in our world above  
Can never well be seen,

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Were imaged by the water's love  
Of that fair forest green  
And all was interfused beneath  
With an Elysian glow,  
An atmosphere without a breath,  
A softer day below.  
Like one beloved the scene had lent  
To the dark water's breast,  
Its every leaf and lineament  
With more than truth expressed,

*Id*, 53, 69

The image of 'pools' mirroring the landscape occurs repeatedly in Shelley's poetry, while here it finds its fullest, perfect expression. The following passages are of special interest both with reference to this image and to the whole poem

a well,  
Dark, gleaming, and of most translucent wave,  
Images all the woven boughs above,

*Alastor*, 457

the moveless wave  
Whose calm reflects all moving things that are,  
*The Revolt of Islam*, 3104

And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,  
As clear as elemental diamond,  
Or serene morning air,

*Epipsychidion*, 436

Quivering within the wave's intenser day,  
*Ode to the West Wind*, 34

Indeed these pools reflecting the landscape seem to be an image of thought's very reality, in its radical aspects. There is *unity* in them, to a remarkable degree, more perceptibly than in the landscape directly seen. There is *depth* in them—unfathomable (cf 'More boundless than the depth of night') There is *purity* (cf 'purer than the day') This purity reflects both creative novelty—

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

the uncorrupted, simple, non-composite character of thought in its live originality—and, on the other hand, the soul's primary quest, self-transcending, never concluded. In Shelley's images the intensity of the *serene* seems to get its quality from all his power of joy and, on the other hand, the keen and deep, fundamental dissatisfaction of a distinctly *ethical* nature, burdened with unsolved problems and with sorrow, seeking for atonement. Compare the lines

Pinnacled dim in the intense inane

*Prometheus Unbound*, III, 1v, 204

Or fragments of the day's intense serene,

*Epipsychidion*, 506

Cf also *Rosalind and Helen*, 957. In no other poet, I think, except in Leopardi, does the 'serene' attain this intenseness of meaning and is to such a degree a reality.

Let us come back to the image of the pools that lie 'under the forest bough'. There is in them, again, perspicuity and distinctness of form—reflecting an intrinsic or *eternal* modality of thought, and not only belonging to the objects *qua* objects. There is in the pool's transparency, in the fact that the water is there, but is not seen as such—rather is converted in the image of the landscape, made invisible in it, yet delicately bears the image itself—a likeness of love (cf. 'Were imaged by the water's love', and ll. 76-8, cf. above, § 2, *ad fin.*). There is represented the distinct acquisition of a deeper truth (cf. 'With more than truth expressed'). This is a fundamental character of artistic activity. For things become *truer*, *more real*, they acquire a new and different reality, when they are, in a non-subordinate way, transformed into intrinsic values and modes of thought. And here, in fact, there is a *clearness*, which is not that of the objects, but is more convincing and powerful, more real as a quality. Above all, not timelessness, but a time not measured by change, or not primarily constituted by change, seems to be suggested. Thought's perpetual identity through its manifold forms seems to be almost perceptible in the stainless mirror, no less, or even more, than in the silence and inviolable quietness of the forest.

Thus Shelley attained in four most memorable instances the

## PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

closest and happiest contact with spirit or, more exactly, was absorbed in it, identified with it, *knowing* it. We may say that in the 'Ode to the West Wind' spirit is discovered and expressed, above all, as *freedom*, in the poem 'To a Skylark', as perpetual *novelty*, in the 'Epipsychidion', as *Oneness*, and in the quietness of the forest near Pisa, as 'self-enshrined' *eternity*.

30 It must now, if ever, appear quite obvious, I hope, how absurdly inadequate those pseudo-theoretical constructions are, which, in order to judge about poetry and art, recur to concepts in which all philosophical study of thought's original nature is ignored—to concepts, for instance, like that of an economy of energy, let us say, in rhythmical rowing, or that of art as a lenitive. Art can be critically valued only with reference to the deepest nature of thought. The worst conditions for artistic and literary criticism, and for art itself, are met when the unity of values, which is spirit, is contemptuously disregarded—any reality being uncritically denied to it. And then the fashions of a self-conceited jargon-poetry, and the very enemies of poetry, disguised as poets, are apt to prevail.

A cloud of philosophical barbarism, false depth, a kind of systematic, highly elaborated exteriority, have marred, for many years, literary life through all the world. And the remarkable fact can be (with little fear of mistake) asserted, that, among English-speaking people, even this poet, one of the very few supreme ever known, is half forgotten. And it is not only as regards Shelley that England is unwittingly throwing away her great inheritance. This is most regrettable. And, moreover, if intellectual leadership is needed for political leadership, would not this be the direct way to renounce both of them?

It is only through the philosophical study of thought's deep nature, that the lovers of poetry, since the age of innocence has been lost, can withstand the influence of deadly fashions and doctrines.



## Chapter IX

### JOHN KEATS

1795-1821

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I Keats describes straight away the moment of *novelty* as outstandingly representative of life and life’s value

Life is the rose’s hope while yet unblown,  
The reading of an ever-changing tale,  
The light uplifting of a maiden’s veil,

*Sleep and Poetry*, 90

The ancient and ever fresh, inexhaustible meaning of the very concept of *being born anew* is again emphasized in the following lines, where the god Pan is addressed

Be still the unimaginable lodge  
For solitary thinkings, such as dodge  
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,  
Then leave the naked brain be still the leaven,  
That spreading in this dull and clodded earth  
Gives it a touch ethereal—a new birth·

*Endymion*, I, 293

And in the spot of serene sky, visible through the dense forest trees, he does not see above all, as others do, infinity, but novelty (cf ‘freshness’)—an *active*, fervent quality

. . . who could tell  
The freshness of the space of heaven above,  
Edg’d round with dark tree tops?

*Id*, I, 84

## JOHN KEATS

(‘Novelty’ must be understood as laying stress on an intimate value of non-predeterminedness and potency, rather than on change ‘Change’ generally points to things and events as regarded from an external point of view, in their objective multiplicity Cf Chapter VIII, §§ 6, 24 )

2 Moonlight and the moonlit landscape do not express in Keats’s images, pre-eminently (as in other poets’ images) *infinity*, enhanced, not hampered, by forms, or melancholy appeased by light’s non-obtrusive presence but a *virgin splendour* in the very womb of eternity The temporal element, implied in creativity and novelty, is especially alive The following lines evoke many remote kinships of values and aspects, which essentially belong (as I maintain) to one and the same original principle But I wish here to point out especially the expressions ‘bright essence’ and ‘wakeful rest’, in which once again the infinite and highly indeterminate (cf ‘essence’, ‘rest’) is characteristically blended with the active and ever-new (cf ‘bright’, ‘wakeful’)

And as I grew in years, still didst thou blend  
 With all my ardours thou wast the deep glen,  
 Thou wast the mountain-top—the sage’s pen—  
 The poet’s harp—the voice of friends—the sun,  
 Thou wast the river—thou wast glory won,  
 Thou wast my clarion’s blast—thou wast my steed—  
 My goblet full of wine—my topmost deed —  
 Thou wast the charm of women, lovely Moon!  
 O what a wild and harmonized tune  
 My spirit struck from all the beautiful!  
 On some bright essence could I lean, and lull  
 Myself to immortality I prest  
 Nature’s soft pillow in a wakeful rest

*Id.*, III, 162

Compare also the expressions ‘thine argent luxuries’ (*Id.*, III, 186), ‘a gleaming melancholy’ (*Id.*, II, 223), ‘One faint eternal eventide of gems’ (*Id.*, II, 225) This brightness, let us point out, owes its aesthetic—and ontological—value to the fact that it is

## JOHN KEATS

neither that of tinsel, nor that of the moon, but that of the 'essence'

This identity of supreme *activity* and supreme *indeterminacy* is found again in the following passages

And, truly, I would rather be struck dumb,  
Than speak against this ardent listlessness

*Id*, I, 824

The calmest thoughts come round us, as of leaves  
Budding—fruit ripening in stillness—Autumn suns  
Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves

'After dark vapors', 9

Cf also *Endymion*, I, 107, II, 112

Accordingly, the Moon's *chastity* cannot be passivity, or cold, hard, exclusive pride, or absolute passionlessness

Though the playful rout  
Of Cupids shun thee, too divine art thou,  
Too keen in beauty, for thy silver prow  
Not to have dipp'd in love's most gentle stream

*Endymion*, II, 179

3 Eternity's intimate, original value is found in the acme and pitch of creativity. It lies on the top of *novelty*. Eternity and novelty are, in Keats's images, indivisible aspects of one reality. This is the dominant motive-value in the 'Ode on the Grecian Urn' (cf below, § 15)

Keats is always watchful of the temporal element in value, of the fleeting, revealing moment, and of time's perpetual flowing.<sup>1</sup> Events, in their joyous novelty, evoke a feeling of the perpetuity of the like events, and a value of deep intrinsic necessity—or eternity—underlying this perpetuity

and the mass  
Of nature's lives and wonders puls'd tenfold,  
To feel this sun-rise and its glories old

*Id*, I, 104

<sup>1</sup> Cf *Ode to a Nightingale*, VII (quoted below, 14), 'I stood tip-toe upon a little hill', 234-8, *To my Brothers*, 7, *Endymion*, II, 135, III, 326, *Hyperion*, II, 1, *After dark vapors have oppress'd our plains*, 13

## JOHN KEATS

4 Absolute immanence of value is Keats's supreme aspiration. This is disinterestedness. It is true glory, superseding all ambitions. This is to find in the fleeting present an original value, which overcomes all thought of personality and of factual death.

When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,

When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,  
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,  
And think that I may never live to trace  
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance,  
then on the shore

Of the wide world I stand alone, and think  
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink

*'When I have fears'*, I, 5, 12

'Love' sinks 'into nothingness', but a purer love has arisen, a higher identification with the eternal, though—or rather, just because—transitory and without reward. Immanence of value is real value, is ultimately the most genuine value, it answers our need for truth. As Shakespeare, in his Sonnet XXIX, sees the present glory of disinterested love, while eager ambitions and all deceptions and misery are thrown into nothing, even more essentially does Keats reach the very origin and substance of glory, in his solitary thought renouncing all, except pure, naked value, unqualified, or qualified only by its infinity and presentness.

Compare the following lines

Oh! what a power hath white Simplicity!  
What mighty power has this gentle story!  
I that for ever feel athirst for glory  
Could at this moment be content to lie  
Meekly upon the grass

*'This pleasant tale . . .'*, 9

## JOHN KEATS

Many more passages could be quoted referring to the same concept-value urgent in Keats's poetry <sup>1</sup>

5 Keats's Muse keenly seeks *indeterminacy*—quality bereft of quality itself, and yet not entirely, but, in this way, becoming in a higher degree inclusive, infinite, and both imponderable and powerful. This may be illustrated by the following extracts:

A little noiseless noise among the leaves,  
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves  
  *'I stood tip-toe*                   *, II*

Upon my ear a noisy nothing rings—  
O let me once more hear the linnet's note!

*Endymion*, II, 321

This is an inward and vital, fundamental process the single noise is lost in its own inherent infinity

In the lines now quoted we are already confronted, I think, though in forms of lesser content and significance, with essentially the same principle of wide communion with infinity and of glorious birth in and through a death-like extinction, which belongs to the deepest nature of creative thought and is—as we have found, so far as we could see—an inspiring motive-value of universal poetry (and not of the romantic especially!) This death-like extinction, as I say, as a positive value, finds in Keats's poetry so much the more a powerful expression, as it is closely related and ultimately one with other aspects of his inspiration (cf especially above, §§ 3 and 4. See 'Ode to a Nightingale', Stanza VI (cf further on, § 14), and the following passages

Yet would I on this very midnight cease,  
And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds,  
Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,  
But Death intenser—Death is Life's high meed  
'*Why did I laugh to-night? No voice will tell*', II

<sup>1</sup> Cf *Dedication To Leigh Hunt, Esq*, 12, *Sonnet XV, On the Grasshopper and Ticket*, 6, *Endymion*, III, 386, 'Mother of Hermes' and still youthful Maya', 14, *Crow Sonnets on Fame*, I, 1. See § 5.

## JOHN KEATS

that I may die a death  
Of luxury, and my young spirit follow  
The morning sun-beams to the great Apollo .  
*Sleep and Poetry*, 58.

When the great deity, for earth too ripe,  
Let his divinity o'erflowing die  
In music, through the vales of Thessaly  
*Endymion*, I, 142

Cf also *Id* , I, 812, IV, 79

6 The *actual cause* is directly referred to Let us quote the following passages

O known Unknown! from whom my being sips  
Such darling essence,  
*Id* , II, 739

It has a glory, and naught else can share it  
The thought thereof is awful, sweet, and holy,

Coming sometimes  
like a gentle whispering  
Of all the secrets of some wond'rous thing  
That breathes about us in the vacant air,  
*Sleep and Poetry*, 24, 27, 29

By all the echoes that about thee ring,  
Hear us, O satyr king!

Dread opener of the mysterious doors  
Leading to universal knowledge  
*Endymion*, I, 277, 288

The 'known Unknown' happily reminds us of the original principle (or the actual cause) in its rich implications, of the subtle kinships of *truths* inherent in it The second and the third passages quoted develop the same conception (The second one refers to poetry) 'Essence' is a favourite word with Keats It is the word for *being* in its potency—in the truth of its intrinsic characterizations, felt as such

## JOHN KEATS

7 'Fellowship with essence' is the highest good It is the greatest possible power It is 'happiness' also

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks  
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,  
A fellowship with essence,

*Id*, I, 777

'Essence' vitally tends to transcend objective multiplicity, and its own form itself, it is, in other words, *in-objective*—'airy'

He ne'er is crown'd  
With immortality, who fears to follow  
Where airy voices lead

*Id*, II, 211

It is above all in poetry and, more generally, in beauty, that 'essence' is attained, recognized

A drainless shower  
Of light is poesy, 'tis the supreme of power,

And still she governs with the mildest sway

*Sleep and Poetry*, 235, 240

Keats addresses himself to 'Sleep', in which already a highly impersonal element, a vast indeterminate presence (through the absence, not absolute, of life), and silence, and mortal quietness, are symbolized, and, alluding to poetry, he says

But what is higher beyond thought than thec?  
Fresher than berries of a mountain tree?  
More strange, more beautiful, more smooth, more regal,  
Than wings of swans, than doves, than dim-seen eagle?  
What is it? And to what shall I compare it?

*Id*, 19

'The gentler-mightiest' is Keats's expression (*Endymion*, III, 43) Compare also *Hyperion*, II, 228 He sees the two qualities as indivisible (cf above, § 2) Beauty is Might  
Moreover,

## JOHN KEATS

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever

*Endymion*, I, 1.

We must interpret this line as laying stress on a value of eternity, rather than of everlastingness. It is not our utilitarian or conservative urge which is meant to be satisfied. Besides, there may be many other enjoyable things capable of being preserved by even more lasting conditions than a moment of attained beauty necessarily is. The idea is most certainly implied, however, that 'a thing of beauty' has power to withstand changes in the world's conditions, in the passing generations, because of its inward or intrinsic truth.<sup>1</sup> But it is above all in one sense, I think, that this fact of being 'a joy for ever' is a special attribute of 'a thing of beauty'. This is our thirst for eternity quenched in the very act, because of the primal and, in a sense, eternal value of 'a thing of beauty', because of the powerful actual infinity of its intrinsic truth. This supremely immanent value makes everlastingness almost insignificant. Keats does not oppose the two concepts—and rightly. It would be artificial to sunder, in an absolute way, everlastingness from the feeling of the intrinsic or *eternal*. But that which is deepest in his heart, I suppose, is beauty's high power of atonement, in which both past and future are, as far as possible, rescued and absolved. Cf. also *Endymion*, I, 6 ff.

8 While being identified with the 'essence', with its perennial novelty—though this be ever intrinsically characterized, and the key of truths, and all-absorbing—we are exposed to the risk of becoming detached from our more strictly personal and more keenly felt responsibilities, from our lifelong interests, from that which may be considered, in certain respects, as our real self. The problem is a constant one in Keats's mind. See below, § 16. Compare the following lines

and I

Have no self-passion or identity

*Endymion*, IV, 476

<sup>1</sup> See below, §§ 15 *ad fin.*, 16, 17. Cf. Chapters VIII, § 8, first paragraph, XV, § 33, passage quoted from 'On the South Coast'



## JOHN KEATS

I have left  
My strong identity, my real self,  
*Hyperion*, I, 113

9 Melancholy and Joy (though generally they are characteristically and admirably reconciled in Keats's poetry) are plastically represented, and contrasted, in the following passage

And as I sat, over the light blue hills  
There came a noise of revellers  
Like to a moving vintage down they came,  
Crown'd with green leaves, and faces all on flame,  
All madly dancing through the pleasant valley,  
To scare thee, Melancholy!  
*Endymion*, IV, 193, 200

'Melancholy' has this poetical relief and clearness, above all, I think, because it is no composite element in a mosaic psyche. It consists in a hopeless want of joy—of *form*—most indeterminate, infinite, original, ultimate, which that 'dancing', however 'mad', cannot hope to appease, but only to remove ('to scare')

Similarly, in the following passage, the very foundation of being, real at its face-value, seems to be elicited, or questioned. 'Laugh' and 'darkness' seem each to emerge as original, ultimate, ungrounded or self-grounded, and so much the more powerful

Heart! Thou and I are here sad and alone,  
I say, why did I laugh? O mortal pain!  
O Darkness! Darkness! ever must I moan,  
To question Heaven and Hell and Heart in vain  
Why did I laugh?  
'*Why did I laugh to-night? No voice will tell*', 5

10 The following fragment affords an example of spiritually concrete, though *objectively* not concrete concepts

Happy is England, sweet her artless daughters,  
Enough their *simple loveliness* for me,

## JOHN KEATS

Enough their *whitest* arms in *silence* clinging  
Yet do I often warmly burn to see  
Beauties of deeper glance, and hear their singing,  
    '*Happy is England!* *I could be content*', 9

In the second line quoted there are no objective existents (except for the words 'their' and, perhaps, 'for me') In the third line the 'whitest', the 'silence', and the 'clinging' are all highly indeterminate and subjectively, spiritually *essential* words, which take the 'arms' into a higher level than that of external objectivity and multiplicity

11 Contemplation of imponderable forms may strikingly reveal certain aspects of the 'essence' (cf §§ 6, 7), but eventually it is in its fully materialized—in its physiologically materialized—expressions, that we know its full force No doubt, in real woman, Keats sees the reviving 'essence', that is to say, he becomes profoundly aware of it, while being inspired by her

There is not such a treat among them all,  
Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,  
As a real woman, .

*Lamia*, I, 330

Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain,  
Inconstant, childish, proud, and full of fancies,  
Without that modest softening that enhances  
The downcast eye, repentant of the pain  
That its mild light creates to heal again  
E'en then, elate, my spirit leaps, and prances,  
E'en then my soul with exultation dances  
For that to love, so long, I've dormant lain  
But when I see thee meek, and kind, and tender,  
Heavens! how desperately do I adore  
Thy winning graces, .  
    '*Woman! when I behold* ' , 1

12 Keats is not a formal aesthete aloof from life's tumult and tragedy His 'essence' is not abstract, one-sided, astray from the integrity of the spirit

## JOHN KEATS

He says of the poet

'Tis the man who with a man  
Is an equal,

*The Poet, 3*

This means that the poet's life is centred in deep human interests and not in conventionalities, that he does not know conventional barriers. He is interested in the inward 'essence', individual and universal at once, and differences of riches, of power, even of authority, are of no account to him.

While merged in quiet contemplation, Keats is goaded by, is unable to forget, the wide world's tragedy. Indeed self-obliteration and humility, and charity itself, or some shade of it, lie in the bosom of the highest beauty, in its very simplicity. And Keats's poetical experience of the 'essence' fully agrees with this conception of the actual cause (as implying all values)

'twas a quiet eve,  
The rocks were silent, the wide sea did weave  
An untumultuous fringe of silver foam  
Along the flat brown sand, I was at home  
And should have been most happy,—but I saw  
Too far into the sea, where every maw  
The greater on the less feeds evermore —  
But I saw too distinct into the core  
Of an eternal fierce destruction,  
And so from happiness I far was gone  
.  
.  
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.  
Still do I that most fierce destruction see—  
The Shark at savage prey,—the Hawk at pounce,—  
The gentle Robin, like a Pard or Ounce,  
Ravening a worm,—Away, ye horrid moods!

*Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds, 89, 102*

Cf further on, § 17, the passage quoted from *Endymion*, I, 789, 795, and 'Give me your patience Sister', 6

13 It is perhaps not within the competence of poetical insight to stretch one's awareness of the 'essence' to cosmological inter-

## JOHN KEATS

pretations Keats says that 'light' originated from 'chaos' and 'parental darkness' (*Hyperion*, II, 191) 'Parental darkness' may be conceived as spiritual (mental)

The following passage, however, contains a quite remarkable suggestion

·   ·   ·   ·   ·  
Just so may love, although 'tis understood  
The mere commingling of passionate breath,  
Produce more than our searching witnesseth  
What I know not but who, of men, can tell  
That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell  
To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,  
The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,  
If human souls did never kiss and greet?

*Endymion*, I, 832, 842

It may be—it is not unreasonable to think—that a destiny of higher realizations has been active, though unrecognized, in lower forms of being. This affords an argument which makes it less unlikely that also in our creative faith there is a destiny, a purpose, though unrecognized, pointing to higher forms of creation

### 14 *Ode to a Nightingale.*

·  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease

I, 5

Song neither originates from joy exclusive ('through envy'), nor from joy 'super-abundant', but from form-effacing, self-dissolving infinity. *Universality* is the soul of song 'Green' (l. 9). the adjective is made a substantive, an image intimate and vast—yet

## JOHN KEATS

not lacking finiteness—is in this way expressed, the quality being thus elicited as, in a higher degree, real in itself—in its inherent infinity, all-pervasive and a principle of unity

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards  
Already with thee! tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays,

IV, 1

We attain the fullest and highest reality of creative thought Its essential characters are expressed (self-revealing) Invisibility (cf 'the viewless wings') is in this connection ontologically true, for original freedom (i.e., form-in-the-making), though essentially a *felt* value, is endlessly form-transcending, radically and vitally in-objective, invisible Yet, from the very core of infinity (cf the three lines last quoted) *visible form*—which is its perennial cause—arises, objectively clear, still instinct with infinity, in all its power and glory

Darkling I listen, and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath,  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!

VI, 1.

Compare above §§ 4, 5 and 8

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down,  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path

## JOHN KEATS

Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn,

### VII, 1

Compare above, § 3

All the passages quoted are sustained by, come forth from, the creative reality. But there is expressed in the Ode also a quite different and conflicting thought. Keats seems to forsake, to forswear, this 'essence', which, however, constitutes his life's highest passion. Indeed he is convinced—he says it elsewhere, in many ways—that beauty is real, supremely real, and that it is truth itself. But now, just while he knows it most directly, he denies or seems to deny the reality and ultimate truth of beauty—or of the 'essence'. For he says, while addressing himself to the bird—or to the vanishing song, or to this very moment of glory and of *truth*

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf

### VIII, 1

In the third stanza also, he seems to seek for forgetfulness, while striving after a far-away reality, supposed only half-real. This shade of thought is ontologically less significant, if not mixed with untruth. It slightly savours of Romanticism. It is not consonant with the poets' and artists' general conviction: for poets and artists, except perhaps musicians, are inclined to think that *reality* lies in their art, rather than outside it. It is especially incongruous with Keats's own vindication. Yet, on the other hand, we must understand that a really cognitive and disinterested attitude is just that which yields sometimes before different and opposite points of view, and is not too self-assured. And, in this very Ode, we see in Keats's mind a fervid doubt about the ultimate criterion of reality (see stanzas VIII, 9-10, IV, 4, VI, 9-10).

## JOHN KEATS

### 15 *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme

. . . . .

I, 1.

A *value of eternity* is firstly expressed by the very rhythm of the verse. For rhythm reflects genuine, intimate spontaneity—a primal power, implying self-obliviousness, self-transcendence, superseding all arbitrary will and hardness and exteriority. *Form*, on the other hand, is firstly elicited (as sometimes occurs in Art's golden periods) by an ardent originality, burning its own vessel—so light it appears. But these values, in poetry, are not only active, they are expressed, signified, in their own terms 'Quietness' and 'silence', through thousands of years enfolding and protecting in the womb of the earth the Grecian Urn, evoke thought's primal constancy. And the comparison between 'rhyme' and the delicate recurrence, in the 'flowery tale', of items of more visible grace, elicits rhyme itself as *form*. For rhyme is the webbing of a larger span of consciousness, it is a moment of intenser presentness, a feast, a joy, a novelty, a freshness, it is full of calls and echoes. At its best, it belongs to the very nature of thought's lively originality.

What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

I, 8

The indefinite question itself expresses the idea of the possible as an actual value of infinity. Every item of action is expected and imminent, yet for ever indeterminate. 'Wild ecstasy' the fervidly self-active and the highly indeterminate are characteristically united, absolute identity between infinity and actuality is again signified (cf § 2)

## JOHN KEATS

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
 Are sweeter, therefore, ye soft pipes, play on,  
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone

II, 1.

Cf above, § 5 While the 'sensual ear', being mentioned, is discarded, a higher degree of indeterminacy—and intimacy—is attained Yet this does not imply that there is a radical difference between a sound as occasioned or provoked by external or by only cerebral conditions Or at least the ontological foundation and, identically, the expressive value of the image do not lie in such assumption—which, in my opinion, would be false

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare,  
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
 Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve,  
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu,  
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
 For ever piping songs for ever new,

II, 5, III, 1

Cf above, § 3

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
 As doth eternity Cold Pastoral!  
 When old age shall this generation waste,  
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'—that is all  
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know

V, 4

'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' We have found in many a passage



## JOHN KEATS

this idea foreshadowed (cf § 6) Indeed it is Keats's most intimate and central idea and, we may say, his message Let us stay a moment on the problem of the relation between poetry—and art in general—and, on the other hand, truth

16 The word 'truth' is used in three main different, though related, meanings

(1) Exact correspondence, or reliable correlation, between our mental presentments and that to which they are referred *Faithfulness* to objective reality

(2) A principle of thought's infinite identification with reality—in and through thought's intrinsic values and modes, and even, were it possible, beyond these This is the very principle of truth Its reality is immediate, substantial, not merely a practical one It is a value in itself, a value of absoluteness It is a value of clearness, of transparency It is a highly *original* value

Art is truth in this second meaning of the word (and, as we shall see, in the third one, closely connected with this) Art, in fact, is athirst for reality It cannot *intentionally* omit anything real—any problem whatever, once it is elicited otherwise it becomes mannerism, imitation, or degenerates in other ways Indeed, its very springs are broken

(3) Inward truth All original value may be described, and happens to be described, on a given occasion, as a moment of 'inward' or 'intrinsic' truth *when it is deeply felt in its non-ephemeral character* The question whether it is a genuine or an illusory one is not easily solved, and *extrinsic* demonstrations are ultimately not available This value of intimacy and truth is, from a general point of view, justified only if we recognize, as we must recognize, that the concept of an intrinsic nature of inner being (i.e., of mental reality, of the mental synthesis) is ontologically grounded

The feeling that *that* which is most intimate, is also essential, universal, infinitely possible, infinitely recognizable, infinitely true, is undoubtedly traceable in all branches of human activity Yet it is there, namely in this relation 'universal because intimate', that the proper field of art lies

'Truth', in the last line of the Ode, means truth in both

## JOHN KEATS

acceptance (2) and (3) of the word Beauty is 'essence', or spirit, in its deep intrinsic or *eternal* character And so is truth—in so far as its immediate, absolutely present value is concerned

17 Inward truth is a common subject-matter both of philosophy and poetry An ever less rudimentary consciousness of self-activity is the secretly active, immanent purpose and sometimes the recognized object of both of them Why then should poets not be considered as directly contributing to the philosophy of the spirit? Why should poets be denied their own claim, to be philosophers, though in their own way? To tax poets with a kind of radical incompetence is entirely gratuitous It is to set up, dogmatically, inexistent barriers

Are there perhaps, in this connection, decisive differences of mental attitude, and temperament? Most certainly there are Philosophers are most often men of harder will—which they exert just where all extrinsic action of the will is pernicious, in theoretical thought They are possessed, generally speaking, by ethical-utilitarian, conservative cravings and ideals They do not seek properly the true, but the stable, the abiding They are busy in explaining away growth and decay, as ultimately unreal The nature of the poet is more generous But this is just what is required for truth!

Yet, as regards Keats, most unhappily, he himself would provide the document showing that he is not a philosopher This would seem the opinion of Professors Katharine E Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn<sup>1</sup> They quote, as showing this, an extract of a letter by Keats, which reads 'As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort, of which, if I am anything, I am a member, that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian, or egotistical Sublime, which is a thing *per se*, and stands alone), it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—it has no character—it enjoys light and shade, it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago or an Imogen What shocks the virtuous

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Esthetics*, Macmillan, New York, 1939, pp 406, 407 The authors' general view on the main question, however, would not be here fairly represented

## JOHN KEATS

philosopher delights the chameleon poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity—he is continually in for and filling some other body. The Sun—the Moon—the Sea, and men and women, who are creatures of impulse, are poetical, and have about them an unchangeable attribute, the poet has none, no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's creatures. If then he has no self, and if I am a poet, where is the wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the Character of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess, but it is a very fact, that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical Nature—how can it when I have no Nature? When I am in a room with people, if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then, not myself goes home to myself, but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me, so that I am in a very little time annihilated—'<sup>1</sup> The letter goes on '—not only among men, it would be the same in a nursery of Children. I know not whether I make myself wholly understood. I hope enough so to let you see that no dependence is to be placed on what I said that day.'<sup>2</sup> Cf. also the following passage from the same letter 'I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night's labours should be burnt every Morning, and no eye ever shine upon them. But even now I am perhaps not speaking from myself, but from some Character in whose soul I now live.'<sup>3</sup>

Leaving aside comparatively less relevant points (with reference to this letter and to my own contention), the chief thing to which attention should be called is that this *receptivity* is the most precious and the rarest element in criticism and in philosophy. It is not passivity, it is *natura naturans*—as opposed to *natura*

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pp. 406-7

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27th October 1818. *The Complete Works of John Keats*, Gowans & Gray, Glasgow, 1900 (reprinted 1924), Vol. IV, p. 173

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 174

## JOHN KEATS

*naturata* (cf Keats's expression in his letter, 'I have no Nature') which is not receptive at all. This receptivity is lacking in the great majority of critics and philosophers. Self-assured philosophers like to speak rather than to listen. On the other hand, let us consider that *coherence* of thought must be original and unlooked for. Extrinsically sought and, in a sense, 'systematic' coherence is the worst enemy of coherence itself. This is possible, as I conceive, because the real thinking subject is itself an intrinsically characterized, ever-original and actual cause—in which we are identified and which is, at any given moment, our real self. It is alive and searching all through the individual's frame or organized nature, while yet it knows this *natura naturata* only in its own (i.e., spirit's) actuality and universality. And its novelty, the very intensity of it, does not mean lack of coherence, precisely because, according to its very nature, it widely renews the past, and because of its rich intrinsic characterization. In fact the deepest coherence is original, creative.

Nobody is more personal than Keats, in some respects. We may recognize him, his deep personality, in each line of his poems. Yet the problem is a perplexing one. Keats is keenly concerned about it (cf. also § 8). To live 'in God's grace' may mean to lose something humanly precious, even from the highest ethical point of view.

Let us consider, on the same subject, another passage from Keats's letters: 'Now, my dear fellow, I must once for all tell you I have not one idea of the truth of any of my speculations—I shall never be a reasoner, because I care not to be in the right, when retired from bickering and in a proper philosophical temper.'<sup>1</sup> He says that, when he is 'in a proper philosophical temper', he does not care 'to be in the right'. This may be variously interpreted, but probably means that then he is not ambitious either to show or to know that *he himself* is the one who is right. And the passage quoted, if it must be interpreted, as it would seem, in this sense, would contain the very picture of the attitude of the perfect philosopher!

The authors quoted say that 'Keats cleared poetry of moral responsibility, as he cut away the poet himself from the legislator

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 13th March 1818. Op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 85.

## JOHN KEATS

and the philosopher' They conceive 'moral responsibility', I think, in too restricted a sense Let us state again, from a general aesthetic point of view, that moral ends and responsibilities must be and have rightly been rejected from the sphere of art in so far as they are conceived as extrinsic ends and objects, not as spiritually concrete values, actually felt and asserted as such Real moral value (the good), as original value, intimately and immediately purposive, belongs to the very power and essence of poetry (cf Chapter II, § 4) The deep moral nature of a poet is recognizable in the very rhythm of his poems Keats does not sunder, in his poems, art from the good (or from morals, in the best sense), rather he points to a common principle in them Cf above, § 12, and the following passages:

Ghosts of melodious prophecyings rave  
Round every spot where trod Apollo's foot

Feel we these things?—that moment have we stept  
Into a sort of oneness, and our state  
Is like a floating spirit's But there are  
Richer entanglements, enthrallments far  
More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,  
To the chief intensity the crown of these  
Is made of love and friendship, and sits high  
Upon the forehead of humanity

*Endymion*, I, 789, 795

Imagine not that greatest mastery  
And kingdom over all the Realms of verse  
Nears more to Heaven in aught than when we nurse  
And surety give to love and Brotherhood

*'Give me your patience Sister'*, 6

The above arguments, concerning the relations between poetry and philosophy, with reference to Keats especially, must be regarded, however, as secondary—so much the more as the passages quoted belong to his prose work, and not perhaps to that *poetical* thought in which both philosophers and poets are most emphatically themselves What matters is that in fact Keats knows the 'essence' as few, if any, philosophers do, as is shown

# JOHN KEATS

by his poems. He does not label it, he does not misrepresent it into an objectively well-defined thing, with clear-cut compartments and outlines, that is why his knowledge—which was also his life's conviction and justification—may escape many a reader, who is perhaps misled by what is, in my opinion, an indefensible concept of knowledge itself.

The poet does not or may not seek knowledge as an extrinsic end. Neither does he seek beauty *as an extrinsic end*. But as an intimate motive-value, beauty is supreme knowledge, and the two things—beauty and the knowing of the spirit—are not distinguished.

18 *Ode to Psyche*

Subjectivity, in that which is intrinsically characterized and deepest in it, has been variously called through the centuries 'spirit', 'essence', the 'active' or 'creative principle', the 'actual cause', and by many more expressions. Keats calls it in this Ode by one of its truest, simplest and least assuming names 'Psyche' is this name, and addressing himself to her, he says

O latest born and loveliest vision far  
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!  
                  though temple thou hast none,  
Nor altar heap'd with flowers,

O brightest! though too late for antique vows,  
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,  
Yet even in these days so far retir'd  
From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,  
Fluttering among the faint Olympians,  
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspir'd

*Ode to Psyche*, 24, 28, 36, 40

The term 'psyche' is vindicated in its true significance. Keats is less one-sided, in this main respect at least, than psychological books generally appear to be. For psyche's *value*, which is, ontologically, the chief thing in it, is not left outside the presentment of it.

## JOHN KEATS

A rosy sanctuary will I dress .  
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,  
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same  
And there shall be for thee all soft delight  
That shadowy thought can win

*Id* , 59, 62

'Shadowy thought' This—like Leonardo's penumbra—is again a name for powerful indeterminacy, for a reality which is fundamental, and creative, and worth study, and which has scarcely anything to do with the 'fringes' of consciousness, or with the subconscious

19 We may conclude this chapter by saying that Keats, perhaps sharing more than anyone else among poets in the nature of an artist, came most deeply into touch with spirit while seeing the 'Grecian Urn' or interpreting its beauty. On this occasion especially, he knew spirit as the *intrinsic* or the *eternal* of beauty—and of truth. We have found that Shelley, like the poets of the fourteenth century, saw it above all in Woman, Coleridge, in contemplative freedom, Blake, and Wordsworth, in Children, William Collins in Simplicity, Milton and Thomas Gray, in inspiration, and Shakespeare, in the image of Ophelia borne by her song, and by her grace and innocence, on the deadly waters. And if we like to indulge in comparisons, though they are only approximate (and, taken literally, quite unsatisfactory), we may add that spirit, that is to say, original causality, in its intrinsic, inexhaustible richness, is in Shakespeare most independent, in a sense, from the author's self. In the poets of the eighteenth century whom I have quoted, and in Milton, it shares in the delicacy and clearness of Music. In Wordsworth and in Coleridge, it is most laboriously sought for. In Shelley, it is most real, self-imposing. But in Keats, it is pure of all inessentials.

## Chapter X

### ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

1806-1861

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THE POETICAL WORKS OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING  
*Oxford Complete Edition*, Henry Frowde, London, 1904

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1 The following passage points out the *immediate* character of the subjective experience which testifies to thought's value of universality

How sure it is,  
That, if we say a true word, instantly  
We feel 'tis God's, not ours,

*Aurora Leigh*, VII, p. 500

The concept of inward or intrinsic truth is also implied. Elizabeth Browning employs the strongest word, 'God', in order to convey in its full value the idea of thought's universality. Undoubtedly the word 'God' owes in part its significance to many other disparate sources—e.g., metapsychical experiences, distinct ethical aspirations, authority. Now to use the word 'God' in order to represent adequately *spirit*—as it is given to us to know it, in its value of universality, and in other aspects—may possibly mean mixing, unduly, heterogeneous elements. On the other hand, the use of the same word in the above sense may be justified, as that which does not belittle, and therefore does not falsify, the reality to which we are referring. The word 'God' brings into light the immensity of the problem involved.

We find the same value of universality expressed—and vindicated—in the following extract



ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

truth itself,  
That's neither man's nor woman's, but just God's,  
*Id., id., p. 498*

The higher we rise in mental activity, the more the world of conditions, and particularly of physiological conditions, is overpowered I maintain, and the reasons for this I hope I have made clear, that we must suppose even in the poorest sensation the transcendency of multiplicity and of external objectivity—an indeterminate and essentially potential moment. Dissatisfaction with form and self as limits depends on this vital principle, which is coessential with subjectivity. Life's and thought's specifications but increase this primordial urge. Racial and sex limitations are therefore fundamentally repugnant to the ultimate nature of inner being, and their overcoming is immediately a spiritual feast. Elizabeth Browning especially seems to feel that any insistence on sex limitations—beyond sheer necessity, or for mere practical purposes—is wrong, and the expression of an aspiration deep as nature itself may be found in a poem addressed to George Sand. She says to her—if we may cite so fragmentary a line

Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore,  
*To George Sand, p. 335*

2 Great is the glory of women in the field of philosophy. They have not left their name—some may object—to outstanding systems, but this must be perhaps reckoned to their credit. The so-called 'system', as I said, is the mundane part of philosophy. It is also the most ephemeral. As for real *system*, all-absorbing vigilant love, real consistency, things take quite a different aspect. A philosophy lived intensely, not *constructed*—not divorced from experience, a psychology which is at one and the same time, as it must be, philosophy, a philosophy which is one's life experience, one's whole life's devotion to a deepening thought, spirit and flesh inseparable. I do not like also to give in myself to general, and generally false, distinctions, but I think that these are marks of a philosophy which especially sustains and enlightens works written by women. These women do not bear the name of philo-

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

sophers they are writers of poems and novels, and mystics Thus Anne de Noailles expressed, and vindicated, in her poems and novels one harmonious philosophical thought, and died, before her time, probably consumed by the very intensity and ardour of her essentially *cognitive* spirit Let me mention, among great mystics, Mme Guyon And in the words of Diotima herself (as it seems to me) there are seeds of truth which could hardly be attributed to her interpreters

Elizabeth Browning's thought develops while keenly concerned with radical oppositions of mental attitudes—as that between knowledge (consciousness) and convention, between spontaneity and mechanism, between that which 'develops from within' (cf *Aurora Leigh*, II, p 398, V, p 451) and external causality, between value and abstract will, between 'what's element' and 'what's convention' (*Id*, VIII, p 518) She stigmatizes that attitude of mind which opposes the real and the ideal She says

Natural things  
And spiritual,—who separates those two  
In art, in morals, or the social drift,  
Tears up the bond of nature and brings death,  
Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse,  
Leads vulgar days, deals ignorantly with men,  
Is wrong, in short, at all points

*Aurora Leigh*, VII, p 498

The fact of setting ideal reality far away in the abstract, while overlooking the spiritual character that the least expression of life possesses, does not denote a really cognitive, loving spirit The conception here expressed by Elizabeth Browning is one of great significance in the history of thought and in everyday life, both from the aesthetical and the ethical point of view For there is a close relation between asceticism and avarice He who treads down the spirit as creative form, treads it down also as an actual value of charity and truth A deep-lying unity of the two aspects, the ideal and the material, is affirmed and vividly represented, e g , in the following passage

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

And (glancing on my own thin, veined wrist),  
In such a little tremor of the blood  
The whole strong clamour of a vehement soul  
Doth utter itself distinct Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,

*Id*, VII, p 499

3 Poetry may constitute the last refuge—and the last bulwark—of philosophy against such pseudo-theories as overlook or ignore all intrinsic character in subjective being. In fact poets—wittingly or unwittingly—deal with value as with a fertile *truth*, and avoid the enormous mistake of considering it as a non-ontological something. With reference, again, to the concept of intrinsic truth, and alluding to poets in general, Elizabeth Browning incidentally says

I write so  
Of the only truth-tellers now left to God,  
The only speakers of essential truth,

*Id*, I, p 387

She insists on the concept of truth as a subjective principle and as such absolutely real—and a *cause* in thought's development—especially with regard to poetical (or artistic) inspiration. If there are those who claim to explain inspiration, both in art and science, by describing it as the result of emotional charges in given conditions—thus evading the quest of anything original (or the problem thereof) and saying nothing, satisfying themselves by using words which draw from the physical sciences an appearance of accuracy,—she keenly feels the insufficiency of such a superficial and quasi-mechanical view. Inspiration is nothing less than *truth*—and truth is spiritual integrity, a nuclear, central reality, and a *force*. Violence done to truth destroys the very source of poetry.

That's wrong thinking, to my mind,  
And wrong thoughts make poor poems

*Id*, V, p 450

How can we identify truth (inward truth) and beauty? If I

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

change the smallest expressive element, the beauty of a verse is lost. Can we say the same of its truth? A verse can hardly be translated—can we say that the truth it expresses is, to the same extent, lost in the translation? Truth, I answer, as an event of inward light, as an actual reality, takes advantage of all the material in which it happens to find its expression, and without which (no less than beauty) it is lost. It needs all—the subtlest affinities with the sonorous and pictorial qualities of the material employed are no less constituent of it.

The following example may come in fitly to illustrate this conception. In the last lines of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' a conviction is expressed, which is quite similar to this implied in Elizabeth Browning's two last-quoted fragments. In Keats's lines truth is felt as a value of intrinsicality or eternity contained in creativity or *form*, and it is entirely identified with beauty. And this value of eternity expressed (in which beauty and truth are one) would be lost if the lines suffered the least change. Elizabeth Browning's statements refer more to something which is not present at the moment—they point to convictions which do not, to a certain extent, form themselves through an immanent cause—at one and the same time testifying to it and to the character of truth itself. Hence the two above-quoted passages, as compared with the last lines of Keats's Ode, possess undoubtedly less beauty, less poetical reality—but also, in a sense, there is *less truth* in them. Thus we find that there is in them in a lesser degree (1) the creative faith in truth and the value of truth which lies in intimate *making*, and (2) the truth which consists in the revelation of spirit's integrity and of its intrinsicality, really eclipsing the self. On the other hand, it is perhaps in a higher degree that we find expressed in Mrs. Browning's lines the claim for abstractly objective truth.

4 Let us quote some more passages concerning the nature of poetry and art in general

Give art's divine,  
Direct, indubitable, real as grief,  
Or leave us to the grief we grow ourselves

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Divine by overcoming with mere hope  
And most prosaic patience

*Id*, II, p 393

'Real as grief' Grief imposes itself on us like crude external reality. In this sense its reality has nothing to do with that of art, and the comparison is only abstract and quantitative. But, besides being *no less* real than the overwhelming world of conditions, grief is eminently real in many other respects, in which the quality of its reality and that of art are kindred. For instance, it possesses in a high degree *infinity*. It desperately strives for absolute comprehension and truth. It seems to be *original*—an original reaction, intimately transcending our particular will, and in the highest degree *pure* (beyond artifice and profit, primordial, redeemer). And, again, it is real with the reality of the spirit, because if we excavate it, we find it again and again confirmed, recognizable, though not precisely the same, while, if we excavate deeper into the material things, we find ever and again new aspects, each cancelling the previous ones as mere transitory appearances.

What is art  
But life upon the larger scale, the higher,  
When  
It pushes toward the intense significance  
Of all things, hungry for the Infinite?

*Id*, IV, p 447

The artist's part is both to be and do,  
Transfixing with a special, central power  
The flat experience

*Id*, V, p 453

'To be and do' This refers to the *being* which lies in the doing, in the making, in the inward becoming. Existence (in art) does not precede value and produce it according to the scheme of external causality. This concept, which we have often met in these pages, seems to be confirmed in other expressions in Elizabeth Browning's poetical thought. 'How we live by loving', she says on one occasion (*A Drama of Exile*, p 134). Cf. *Loved Once*, II,

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

p 282 'And by To Love do apprehend To Be', and *De Profundis*, XXIV, p 569 Value ('love') is a real cause, ultimately, and not a mere result And this is better seen in art — 'Transfixing' She expresses in her own words the same conception already pointed out (cf Chapter VIII, § 29, last paragraph but one) of a transformation which is a 'becoming truer', a concept-value which characterizes poetical and artistic thought Art is a dynamic essence of the same nature as life (it is 'life in life', cf *Aurora Leigh*, I, p 387), it is, in mental activity, a 'central' moment, in which thought's original values and modes—either as qualifying the objects, or for themselves—are revived and called back to their ever-originating principle and intrinsic necessity, and renewed in their subtle affinities and ultimate unity

Thus is Art  
Self-magnified in magnifying a truth  
Which, fully recognized, would change the world  
And shift its morals

*Id* , VII, 499

This view can be maintained chiefly on these grounds (cf Chapter VIII, § 20) The deepening of self-activity—of original freedom, of the original formative principle—brings forth its primal, deep intrinsic character, namely, its value of universality—both logical and ethical And the winged infinity of song is especially akin to this value of universality, shares in it, proclaims it Again, men blinded by external, extrinsically conceived ends, or hemmed in by pride, are likely to slight and disdain, or fanatically to withstand, both the harmonious power of a deeper spirituality, and art

Art's creative principle, we may easily suppose, is directly described also in the following words It is described as

a truth which draws  
From all things upward

*Id* , VII, p 499

(Cf on the distinct concept of 'height', Chapter VIII, §§ 5 and 27) The word 'truth' is happily used to mean a reality which is intrinsically characterized *ad infinitum*, and which—being made

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

both logically and grammatically the (active) subject of the proposition—is forcibly presented as a *cause*

5 Proceeding, with Elizabeth Browning, in the quest for the irreplaceable springs of subjectivity, we come face to face again with that deep-rooted *dissatisfaction*, which is the measure of a soul's worth (cf Chapter I, § 14). She says

Nor man nor nature satisfies whom only God created  
*Cowper's Grave*, VIII, p 296

Compare also the passages

For here satiety proves penury  
More utterly irremediable  
*Aurora Leigh*, V, p 455

We, staggering 'neath our burden  
Support the intolerable strain and stress  
Of the universal,  
*Id*, V, p 453

The dissatisfaction, referred to in the first passage quoted above, is probably most closely related with this 'intolerable strain and stress' of the 'universal', or one with it. This is the feeling of life, or being, as a principle, an urge, a claim, primal and infinite, superseding and almost disclaiming all its single forms. Is it contained, is it intelligible, in the nature of an active principle immanently conceived? Or does this very value of the creative form suggest a transcendent cause? Elizabeth Browning is not explicit on this point, though she seems to lean towards a *relatively* transcendent (cf Chapter VI, § 4) interpretation of this urge of the 'universal'.

We must not, however, stretch too far such a conflict between life's (or spirit's) infinite intimate demand and, on the other hand, the earthly answer to it. Thought, in its full *freedom*, recovers a kind of equilibrium—a spiritual integrity is found, in which all the soul's wounds are healed. Elizabeth Browning expresses sometimes the feeling of a vast renewing power, in which the deepest longing, and freedom, and infinity, and joy, and

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

form, are not at all at variance Compare the following fragment

Till in the deep calms of space my soul may right  
Her nature,

*Finite and Infinite*, p 333

The inner relation between the most radical aspects of original causality is recognizable in the following lines, and *makes* their pregnant and wide significance The 'future', even more than 'the deep calms of space' (cf the passage above quoted), expresses the original and present value of an infinite possibility, freedom and creativity, spirit or *grace* unhindered by any trace whatever of form *qua* formed The 'past', on the other hand, represents the particular self, the form *qua* formed, all particularity, all the world of conditions The words 'past' and 'future' could hardly be brought to a more intense significance

Only embrace and be embraced  
By fiery ends,—whereby to waste,  
And light God's future with my past

*A Vision of Poets*, p 171

The essential forward urge of the mental synthesis is brought into light in its deep subjective, spiritual reality and ultimate source — 'By fiery ends' the 'ends' are at once an object and a subject, they are active, inwardly purposeful

The following passage shows the peculiar inherence of the *infinite* in such sensuous qualities of external nature as may be perceived by a blind man—and the superior value, in many respects, of this, so to say, *lower* sensuous awareness as compared with that which may be a determined, objective, more distinct view of the same landscape through the organ of sight It refers to a mother who has lost her blind son, and is addressed to her It says

Dost thou weep, mourning mother,  
For thy blind boy in grave?  
That no more with each other  
Sweet counsel ye can have?



ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

That thou canst no more show him  
The sunshine, by the heat,  
The river's silver flowing,  
By murmurs at his feet?  
The foliage, by its coolness,  
The roses, by their smell,  
And all creation's fulness,  
By Love's invisible?

*The Mourning Mother*, p 298

6 A fresh genuine expression for original causality we find when she speaks of 'blossoming causes',

all a-glow  
With blossoming causes,

*Aurora Leigh*, VII, 499

Indeed the word 'cause' is generally used to mean causal condition or antecedent, or a given, extrinsically conceived, final cause, which is still an antecedent but here the same word is summoned to mean something originally active and not merely a link (however relevant) in the chain of conditions. This is a daring and revealing expression.

The *glory* which belongs to form in its forming and not to form *qua* formed—the first gradual birth of light, the taking shape, the delicate first hour of becoming—is represented in its subtle value and inward reality 'Silence' (another name for indeterminacy, or the *potential* moment, as an actual reality) lies in the core of the budding forms, and is not lost, it 'opens', in the manifold aspects arising.

I used to get up early, just to sit  
And watch the morning quicken in the grey,  
And hear the silence open like a flower  
Leaf after leaf,

*Id.*, I, p 384

The mystery of the freshness and harmony of a flower is poignantly represented in the following lines. Yet these would

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

show but a poor poetical value, were we to disregard how earnestly and thoroughly the author is concerned with fundamental aspects of spontaneity and life

O rose, who dares to name thee?  
No longer roseate now, nor soft, nor sweet,  
But pale, and hard, and dry, as stubble-wheat,  
*A Dead Rose*, I, p 293

The concept of 'form *qua* formed', apt to become in our philosophical language an abused formula—full of the traditions of the schools and empty of meaning—is freshly, properly and simply described by her as that of indurated form. The externally constructive process of the mind is convincingly described

She, at least,  
Was not built up as walls are, brick by brick,  
Each fancy squared, each feeling ranged by line,  
The very heat of burning youth applied  
To indurate form and system!

*Aurora Leigh*, IV, p 434

Compare, on this subject, *Id*, III, p 421

Remarkable with Elizabeth Browning is also the use of the verbal form 'loving', sometimes instead of 'love',—a verbal form which the English language affords and which is particularly close to life, or more precisely, to life conceived as *intimate becoming*. Cf *A Lay of the Early Rose*, p 278 'Down the hidden depths of loving' A real love is 'a deepening love'—to use another of Mrs Browning's searching expressions (*Isobel's Child*, VI, p 186, cf above, § 4, *A Drama of Exile*, p 134)

Does shame (modesty) reveal a vitally and essentially secret moment of our consciousness—because of which the latter refuses to be fixed in the world of objectivity? It seems that, while describing 'shame', Elizabeth Browning draws near to the very 'fire of life'—to an ultimate substance, and that on this the power of her verse depends

Girls blush sometimes because they are alive,  
Half wishing they were dead to save the shame,

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

The sudden blush devours them, neck and brow,  
They have drawn too near the fire of life

*Aurora Leigh*, II, p 401

Cf also *The Lost Power*, LXII, p 269

7 The following passage represents Nature as *confessing itself* of animal life, not only expressing it, or developing and realizing itself in it as if the latter were the outcoming of an inward purpose working through infinite ages, but rarely bursting forth, and in the meantime kept secret and almost unknown, or as too daring, too ambitious a performance, or, again, as a sin, or containing something sinful

like dumb creatures (now  
A rustling bird, and now a wandering deer,  
Or squirrel 'gainst the oak-gloom flashing up  
His sidelong burnished head, in just her way  
Of savage spontaneity), that stir  
Abruptly the green silence of the woods,  
And make it stranger, holier, more profound,  
As Nature's general heart confessed itself  
Of life, and then fell backward on repose

*Id*, IV, 431

This keener spontaneity of the swift living beings as compared with that of the vegetable life, the kinship between this and the former, an immanent purpose common to them, these concept-values are expressed, which lie deep in the poet's heart, and are inseparable from the picture of the landscape. We are faced with the mystery of spontaneity outside all preconceptions. No solution is put forward, but we grow conscious of our ignorance, and of the urgency of the mystery or of the problem involved. A deeply immanent and almost pantheistic interpretation of reality, especially of value itself, is suggested.

8 It is above all in the expression of love's passion that Elizabeth Browning's poetry cannot be compared with any other's. For generally poets—and even, and more remarkably, the highest

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

and most *essential* poets—in their passionate songs, precisely where they express love's passion, may be also understood to refer to their own soul's life in a more general sense, to their creative labour, to thought's essential modes—as self-dissatisfaction, self-abnegation, and the glory of being born again, infinite spirit rekindled through the shattered relics of life. But with Elizabeth Browning—though she is no less *essential*—we know unmistakably that she primarily expresses love's passion. Let me quote only a very few passages, which may remind us of the full context, and let me not obscure them with any comment whatever.

Say, what can I do for thee? weary thee, grieve thee?  
Lean on thy shoulder, new burdens to add?

*Insufficiency*, II, p. 313

But love me for love's sake, that evermore  
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity  
*Sonnets from the Portuguese*, XIV, p. 321

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right,  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith  
*Id.*, XLIII, p. 327

## Chapter XI

### HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

1807-1882

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THE POETICAL WORKS OF LONGFELLOW *Oxford University Press*,  
ed 1934

1 Many concepts concerning poetical inspiration are not only *operative*, but to a certain extent explicit in the following short passage

O that a Song would sing itself to me  
Out of the heart of Nature,

*Moods*, p 721

(1) 'sing itself to me' The thinking subject is *not* to be identified with the particular self of the poet—in which his will (in the restricted sense of the word) and his more intentional and preconceived thought are predominant This is also concisely expressed in the lines

His, and not his, are the lays  
He sings, and their fame  
Is his, and not his,

*L'Envoi The Poet and his Songs*, p 769

(2) The thinking subject is to be identified with an original value, self-active It *is*, as I maintain, value *qua* active (3) 'Out of the heart of Nature' The song yearns for a source possessing a deep ontological character (4) The song is kindled in the objective richness of 'Nature' (5) There is freedom, and joy, in the

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

self-realizing form, and a value of infinity which we seem to know in the very core of it. Song is its fittest expression. This is immediately felt, though not stated, in the first passage quoted above. It is distinctly said, though not less immediately felt, in the following lines

O Life and Love! O happy throng  
Of thoughts, whose only speech is song!

*A Day of Sunshine*, p. 320

(6) The concepts referred to, and especially those of ontological depth and of self-transcendence, suggest that of universality. The character of universality of any piece of real poetry, especially from the point of view of its accessibility or intelligibility, is a subject on which Longfellow particularly insists.

Expression is communion: this does not depend, primarily, on pragmatical reasons, but on a value of self-transcendence which is inherent in the intrinsic, original nature of thought.<sup>1</sup> Now it seems that many a passage in which Longfellow asserts the universal character of poetry reflects the very idea of thought's *inseparable originality and universality*, and not only an ethical aspiration, or a matter-of-fact view. For instance, in the 'Tales of a Wayside Inn', we read that these tales are

World-wide apart, and yet akin,  
As showing that the human heart  
Beats on for ever as of old,  
And without preface would begin

*Tales of a Wayside Inn*, III, *Interlude*, p. 435

Cf *Id.*, I, *Interlude*, p. 359, *The Seaside and the Fireside*, *Dedication*, p. 175

The idea that the highest poetry finds 'an answer in each heart' (cf. *Oliver Basselin*, p. 307) is obviously related to the conviction that art's highest expressions are 'simple' and 'clear' (cf. *The Children of the Lord's Supper*. From the Swedish of Bishop Tegnér, p. 54). The world of *conditions*—this indeed may be very complicated and obscure. Again, the technical aspect of an art may belong exclusively to a small number of adepts. But, most gener-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chapter VIII, §§ 6, 8, 10

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

ally, in art, obscurity depends on arbitrariness, and on merely mechanical superimposition of thoughts, and of the dearth of the real *seed*, and artistically, in so far as I can see, it has no content, except perhaps that of pride

The assumption, moreover, according to which the *uniqueness* of the act of thought in its living reality is to be found in the *accident* and in sheer particularities and does not lie in the essential and intelligible nature of thought itself, is, I am convinced, absolutely false <sup>1</sup>

No doubt some reserves must be made concerning this intelligibility of poetry. We must consider that—the lack of special preparation being left aside as of little account—there are those who are deaf to poetry for deeply rooted *second causes*. They may not be perversely blind to a sense of inward light, but they know it perhaps in practical and ethical life, perhaps in this or that form of art, but not in the discursive form of poetry. Again, obscurity may be dependent on, and to a certain extent justified by, the fact that we are skimming over the boundaries of our power of understanding reality—either external reality or thought itself. But this may occur only exceptionally in art, besides, we are easily aware that that is the nature of the difficulty we meet with, and we submit ourselves to the inevitable. Therefore, in my opinion, Longfellow's point of view about the universality and accessibility of poetry is justified. For the motives of the spirit are simple and few, and because desire for communion lies in the very spring of song

Inspiration in art is

an evening twilight that faintly  
Gleams in the human soul, even now, from the day of  
creation,

*The Children of the Lord's Supper*, p. 53

These lines are translated from the Swedish of Bishop Tegnér, yet the poem seems to reflect the translator's own vein of poetry and his very thoughts

It is Longfellow's conviction that essentially the same motive-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chapters I, § 22, VIII, § 24 (2), IX, § 16 (3)

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

values are discernible in flowers and in men—'desires', 'wishes', 'hopes', now 'tender', now 'brilliant', now vast

These in flowers and men are more than seeming,  
Working are they of the self-same powers,  
Which the Poet, in no idle dreaming,  
Seeth in himself and in the flowers

*Flowers*, p 6

This epitomizes my main contention in this work (provided we take words seriously) Cf *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, III, p 432, 'The meaning and the mystery of the rose', *Id*, p 426

Yet Longfellow sees above all in inspiration a healing and helping power (cf *Moods*, p 721), a message, recalling us up 'to heaven' (*The Singers*, p 191), and a Promethean, fiery leaven (*Prometheus*, p 299)

He is fascinated by the work of the potter (cf *Kéramos*, p 724), as if he were confronted with the very mystery of the relation between thought (in its strictly plastic power) and an extremely ductile material ('the shapeless, lifeless mass of clay') Cf also *The Masque of Pandora*, I, p 685

The essential rôle of the medium, or the material or means of expression—which is far more than a *medium* or a *means*—in artistic thought, has been thrown into relief by English poets through such expressions as 'to think in marble', 'to think in bronze' (Robert Browning, Meredith,<sup>1</sup> Oscar Wilde), suggesting also the essential rôle of *words* in our thoughts Longfellow finds in this connection a most pregnant expression, when he describes Giotto's tower

The lily of Florence blossoming in stone,—  
A vision, a delight, and a desire,

*Giotto's Tower*, p 537

In fact architecture is the art in which the material weight of the medium contributes in the highest degree to express the *lightness* of thought or vision—to express the so-called 'unsubstantial', yet most substantial reality, by which precisely the weight (*qua* sensed or imagined by us), and the obscure massiveness, and

<sup>1</sup> *Earth and Man*, XXV



## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

crude multiplicity, of matter are conquered and, as such, forgotten

2 We find in Longfellow's poems also (though he is a poet comparatively more interested in external events themselves, than intimately cognitive) the concept expressed of 'life in death' that is to say, *infinity* and *glory* found and realized in the very moment of death-like extinction, value immanent in this very transient moment—in the renunciation of all that is lasting, or useful, or connected with any *self* whatever. He speaks of the angels of wind and fire who 'chant only one hymn',

and expire

With the song's irresistible stress,  
Expire in their rapture and wonder,

*Sandalphon*, p. 316

Cf *From the Spanish Cancioneros*, p. 324. He puts into prominence the moment of creative novelty, always while speaking of children, and youth, and of 'all things' rejoicing in the fullness of 'their first delight' (*It is not always May*, p. 63, cf *To-Morrow*, p. 537). The students of the Mediaeval School of Salerno are represented as discussing the saying 'that God can only exist in creating' (*The Golden Legend*, p. 518). Value lies in the *present*, in the very act of doing, or becoming 'Act—act in the living Present!', he says (*A Psalm of Life*, p. 3). And again

Hast thou e'er reflected

How much lies hidden in that one word, *now*?

(Victorian) Yes, all the awful mystery of Life!

*The Spanish Student*, p. 83<sup>1</sup>

He strives to give us the very Gospel of Value's immanence

No endeavour is in vain,

Its reward is in the doing,

*The Wind over the Chimney*, p. 535

Let us not be misled. Longfellow is too much a believer in the *objects* of human activity, for the fire of *presentness* to penetrate

<sup>1</sup> Italics in the text

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

his poetry, except, let us say, to a certain extent. Also, in 'The Masque of Pandora', he stigmatizes the lingering in the present, which he calls 'dalliance' (p. 689) and emphatically opposes it to useful work (p. 693).

The present, in fact, is ever transcended (cf. *The Spanish Student*, p. 78). But, again, there is in this transcending the present—as conceived by Longfellow—an immanent value. 'Work is prayer', he says (*Michael Angelo*, I, p. 789). He wants to go to the bottom of life's earnestness and reality, and by saying that life is 'real' (*A Psalm of Life*, p. 3) he certainly does not mean that its being 'real' depends only or chiefly on transcendent and non-present realities. He extols renewal through action and through (intimate) faith (*The Sifting of Peter*, p. 765), 'patient endurance' (*Evangeline*, II, 1, p. 158), stern effort, 'endless endeavour' (*The Masque of Pandora*, VI, p. 694, cf. *Excelsior*, p. 66, *Ultima Thule, Dedication*, p. 759 'The unending, endless quest'). In the ebb and flow of time he feels and depicts a strange and deep urge which ever exceeds the present moment and its actual Infinite (cf. below, § 7).

3 In his poem 'Weariness', he is thinking of children—the long way they have to walk, the strength, and the freshness, and the marvellous faith, in their budding souls (p. 320). Whenever he speaks of children, Longfellow comes, in the most genuine way, in contact with life as an original principle. He does not trace their *untaught* grace and wisdom either to ante-natal existences, or to a transcendent power. Let us refer, for instance, to the poem beginning

Come to me, O ye children!  
For I hear you at your play,  
And the questions that perplexed me  
Have vanished quite away  
Ye open the eastern windows,  
That look towards the sun,  
Where thoughts are singing swallows  
And the brooks of morning run

*Children*, p. 315

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Cf also *The Open Window*, p 188, *My Lost Youth*, p 308, *The Children's Hour*, p 317 He compares children to the leaves of a tree

Ere their sweet and tender juices  
Have been hardened into wood,

*Children*, p 316

Cf *The Golden Legend*, VI, p 520

With reference to the intelligence of children, the following passage, translated from the Swedish of Bishop Tegnér, no doubt expresses and sums up Longfellow's convictions as well It says that

sublimity always is simple,  
Both in sermon and song, a child can seize on its meaning  
*The Children of the Lord's Supper*, p 54

4 There are philosophers who claim that there is no value of universality, and therefore no moral value, in *affections* Certainly there is no such value in so far as affections turn into the expression of exclusiveness and pride But their very principle lies in communion, self-surrender, mutual understanding—that is to say, in a feeling which is essentially generous at its disclosing, and which implies the transcendency of form and self It contains an actual value of infinity, which only in quite an arbitrary way can be sundered from universality in its highest ethical meaning These philosophers hold in their mind an abstractly objective scheme of universality, which may have something to do with the pride of an all-controlling will, but very little with love, or even with reason's deepest claim for all-inclusive reality The error, I am convinced, not only violates the use of language—according to which the word 'love', in its full meaning, is referred to affections, and not only to the golden rule of charity, but it is a blasphemy both against affections and against the spirit, it is, above all, a groping in utter darkness The philosophy of the poets, as I would call it, or the prevailing philosophy, implicit or explicit, among them, abhors such a view And in this connection, Longfellow's poetry so much the more deserves our attention, for the *holiness of affections* is in his poetry a dominant motive-value And also, it would be worth while watching how

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

in his poems this intimate value of affections blends, as expressing fundamentally one and the same reality, with that of self-abnegation and duty

Many poems of Longfellow ought to be quoted in this connection. These lines may recall to our mind many more passages or poems, they show a moment of vivid affection, in which humbleness and gentle pride unite

He hears his daughter's voice  
Singing in the village choir,  
And it makes his heart rejoice

*The Village Blacksmith*, p. 61

And these dedicatory words are no less evocative of one of the main sources of his poetry

Ye who believe in affection that hopes, and endures and  
is patient,  
Ye who believe in the beauty and strength of woman's  
devotion,

*Evangeline*, 142

5 The 'Song of Hiawatha' lends itself to the realization of Longfellow's ideal concept of poetry, namely, to the expression of simple truths, capable of being, through their spiritual foundation, universally understood—even among uncivilized nations. Readers of to-day, who follow the fashion, may find too obvious, for instance, the following passage, in which the tightening of a bond of love is described

Only Owenee, the faithful,  
Saw your naked heart and loved you  
*The Song of Hiawatha*, XII, p. 241

Yet the meaning of the word 'naked', as here used, is not easily exhausted

Let us consider from the same point of view the following passage from 'Evangeline'. A prejudiced reader may object that

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

the idea that love is infinite—all-comprehensive, all-discounting—in the present moment, is too old and well known. In fact it may be so as an abstract idea, abstractly asserted. But as a value of inward truth, as a moment of life, *poetically*, i e., creatively, lived through, spiritually concrete, it is always new and revealing.

Gabriel! be of good cheer! for if we love one another  
Nothing, in truth, can harm us, whatever mischances  
may happen!

*Evangeline*, I, 5, p. 155

6 The feeling of the infinite as conveyed by the image of *night* blends with a feeling of intimacy—

We sat and talked until the night,  
Descending, filled the little room,  
Our faces faded from the sight,  
Our voices only broke the gloom.

*The Fireside of Driftwood*, p. 184

It blends with a feeling of sadness and anguish—

In the dead of the night she heard the disconsolate  
rain

*Evangeline*, I, 4, p. 153

It allows for a wider and deeper sense or grasp of reality, for a view more confident and serene, and it fits in with the awakening of memories and affections—

When the hours of Day are numbered,  
And the voices of the Night  
Wake the better soul, that slumbered,  
To a holy, calm delight,  
Then the forms of the departed  
Enter at the open door,  
The beloved, the true-hearted,  
Come to visit me once more,

*Footsteps of Angels*, p. 5

It blends with a feeling of joy, which Melancholy tempers and widens—

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Silently one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven,  
Blossomed the lovely stars,

*Evangeline*, I, 3, p 150

And, in a richer image, it merges into love itself, while, at the same time, it forms out of itself its *object* in the shape of the Night, the Beloved—

I felt her presence, by its spell of might,  
Stoop o'er me from above,  
The calm, majestic presence of the Night,  
As of the one I love

*Hymn to the Night*, p 3

7 This same original power of wide indeterminacy, which the *might* expresses especially through the medium of space, acquires a distinctly new quality while realizing itself in and through time. It acquires this new quality first *a parte subjecti*, inasmuch as the temporal direction is coessential with the mental synthesis, with form-in-the-making, with self-activity. Moreover, practical and ethical problems, involving the future, both qualify and enhance this feeling itself. Undoubtedly the element of time is foremost in Longfellow's thoughts. External monotonous movements suggest and express a feeling of infinity and of a dim something which is ever transcended and yet ever original and present. It is indeed an obvious feeling, yet ontologically and poetically significant. Let us quote some passages on this subject.

Oft in sadness and in illness  
I have watched thy current glide,  
Till the beauty of its stillness  
Overflowed me like a tide

*To the River Charles*, p 64.

Its woodlands were in leaf and bare again,  
Moons waxed and waned, the lilacs bloomed and died,  
In the broad river ebbled and flowed the tide,

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Ships went to sea, and ships came home from sea,  
And the slow years sailed by and ceased to be

*Tales of a Wayside Inn*, II, p 415

Cf *Elegiac*, p 763

Turn, turn, my wheel! All life is brief,  
What now is bud will soon be leaf,  
The blue eggs in the robin's nest  
Will soon have wings and beak and breast,  
And flutter and fly away

Stop, stop, my wheel! Too soon, too soon  
The noon will be the afternoon,  
Too soon to-day be yesterday,

*Kéramos*, pp 725, 729

Cf also *The Bridge*, p 128, *The old Clock on the Stairs*, p 134,  
*The Two Rivers*, p 719

8 But a new element, again, intervenes in Longfellow's poetry, most characteristically and significantly, and enriches and enhances this very feeling of infinity in and through time. This is the thought of men's endless generations, history *felt*, and, in the following passage, also the implicit idea of an incumbent fate (for with the new tide the ship was to sail carrying the emigrants away from their new home)

'Twas the returning tide, that afar from the waste of  
the ocean,  
With the first dawn of the day, came heaving and hurrying  
landward

*Evangeline*, I, 5, p 157

Cf in this connection, *A Shadow*, p 714, and the following passages

Daily the tides of life go ebbing and flowing beside  
them,—

Thousands of throbbing hearts, where theirs are at rest  
and for ever,

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Thousands of aching brains, where theirs no longer are  
    busy,  
Thousands of toiling hands, where theirs have ceased  
    from their labours,  
Thousands of weary feet, where theirs have completed  
    their journey!

*Id*, p 173

Love immortal and young in the endless succession  
of lovers

*The Courtship of Miles Standish*, IX, p 297

9 Few poets have found in history, from an historical and political point of view, a genuine source of inspiration, and among these, in my opinion, Longfellow must be numbered I shall quote the following passage, which seems to me to be written in his richest vein. He symbolizes the Union (the United States) by the ship he is describing and, addressing himself to her, he says

Humanity with all its fears,  
With all the hopes of future years,  
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!  
Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,  
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,  
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,

*The Building of the Ship*, pp 180, 181

It is (I suppose) just because Longfellow is comparably *less* of an intimate and philosophical poet and is more interested in events in and for themselves, that we are more likely to find in his songs accents of genuine poetry concerning historical and political occurrences—in their very existential aspect. In like manner, I would think, Giosuè Carducci, who also was comparatively an externally minded, non-philosophical poet, proved in many of his songs a conspicuous poet of history and, dealing with the French Revolution, struck a higher note than Victor Hugo himself, for Victor Hugo, I would suggest, in his poetry, was too



## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

much interested in *essential* truth to be to the same degree absorbed in the facts themselves

Compare, in this connection, *The Slave Singing at Midnight*, p 70, *The Arsenal at Springfield*, p 119 But—with reference to moral problems in general, rather than especially historical ones—many passages should be quoted and I regret to omit them, for, though they vary in artistic concentration, they are all alike the expression of an harmonious mind, the enemy of cruelty and cowardice in all their forms, and this is far more closely connected with poetical or artistic inspiration than is generally maintained

10 The poetical value (which I have many times pointed out) of a quality expressed through an indefinite noun, *unsupported*, real in itself, may find illustration and confirmation also in Longfellow's poems, e g , in the last line of the following passage (it is the old Viking, 'the Skeleton in Armour', who is speaking)

Once as I told in glee  
Tales of the stormy sea,  
Soft eyes did gaze on me,  
    Burning yet tender,  
And as the white stars shine  
On the dark Norway pine,  
On that dark heart of mine  
Fell their soft splendour

*The Skeleton in Armour*, p 46

11 However, it would hardly be worth while looking for radical truths (concerning the nature of self-activity) revealed or embodied in such lively and moving expressions as, for instance, the following—in a passage from 'The Courtship of Miles Standish', in which Longfellow speaks of letters which 'will go by the May Flower',

Homeward bound with the tidings of all that terrible  
winter,

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Letters written by Alden, and full of the name of

Priscilla,

Full of the name and the fame of the Puritan maiden

Priscilla!

*The Courtship of Miles Standish*, I, p. 275

Indeed Longfellow excels in narrative poetry, where he recollects and revives, in a few simple words, persons and places, moments and gestures. No doubt his narrative poetry is creative, rather than descriptive, *creatively* absorbing the subject, pregnant with it. Yet, in many of his images, a poetical value must be admitted, in which the concepts we are investigating, though present, have no special relief.

## Chapter XII

### ALFRED TENNYSON

1808-1892

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THE WORKS OF ALFRED LORD TENNYSON *Macmillan*, 1900 (Complete Edition, first printed 1894)

1 An intense unsatisfied longing, a bleak despair, and, on the other hand, 'a glowing and growing light', magnificence of colours, a culmination of joy, strike us as characteristically co-existent in Tennyson's poetry. The moment of indeterminacy lies in the 'dim' and 'dark' dawn and subsists no less in the loud voices of the day and in its winged hopes and joys. An incumbent immensity makes incomparably more real, and purer, the birth of joy (that is to say, of *form*, born as it were of an abysmal depth), while yet coexisting with it and, in a sense, obscuring it. Let me quote the following passages

Risest thou thus, dim dawn, again,  
So loud with voices of the birds,  
So thick with lowings of the herds,  
*In Memoriam*, XCIX, p. 275.

Silence, beautiful voice!  
Be still, for you only trouble the mind  
With a joy in which I cannot rejoice,  
A glory I shall not find

*Maud*, V, 3, p. 291

Then let come what come may  
To a life that has been so sad,  
I shall have had my day

*Id.*, XI, 2, p. 294

O when did a morning shine  
So rich in atonement as this  
For my dark-dawning youth.

And thus a delicate spark  
Of glowing and growing light  
Kept itself warm in the heart of my dreams.

haunted by the starry head  
Of her whose gentle will has changed my fate, .

2 A quite different relation between form and indeterminacy is found, when form is merged in a comparatively formless and wider moment, or completely identified with it. We are then confronted with the same concept of death-like extinction, of which we well know the inexhaustible poetical power. We find it expressed also, and most happily, in Tennyson's poems.

For a breeze of morning moves,  
And the planet of Love is on high,  
Beginning to faint in the light that she loves  
On a bed of daffodil sky,  
To faint in the light of the sun she loves,  
To faint in his light, and to die

And all the mermen under the sea  
Would feel their immortality  
Die in their hearts for the love of me

It is in the very act of being born anew—and this through the destruction of his particular self, and so much the more of his 'immortality'!—that the lover discovers whatever there is of primal and infinite in the formative principle itself. The beloved—the Mermaid—is conscious of this *infinite*, of which she is the

## ALFRED TENNYSON

cause, and is pleased with it She plays the rôle of the vital *form*  
Thus also in the following lines

She, looking thro' and thro' me  
Thoroughly to undo me,  
Smiling, never speaks  
So innocent-arch, so cunning-simple,

*Lilian*, II, p 6

These are most essential motive-values They are both poeti-  
cally and ontologically, ultimately, real They are not small  
truths

3 Indeterminacy as the moment of the soul's infinite intimate  
demand, or want, or dissatisfaction, is directly expressed in and  
for itself, without relation to *form*, in the lines

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
Tears from the depth of some divine despair

*The Princess, a Medley*, IV, p 186

It is implicitly represented and acutely felt as a reality which, in  
so far as we know or understand, is original, and ultimate, and  
at the same time is a problem—or a mystery

4 Yet, in the depth of the actual cause, distinctions (about its  
aspects and modalities) can hardly be drawn There is an essen-  
tial key-note, in which 'day' and 'night' no longer intermingle,  
or no longer merge one into the other, but are in fact one and  
the same reality Night is but a wider day Things are half-lost  
in their qualities, and these converge into one common prin-  
ciple, one essence, one form—a subtle web of virtual powers  
Is there anything more real—from a subjective and ontological,  
not merely practical point of view—than this shadowy light, in  
which the two moments of the one principle absolutely coin-  
cide? This accounts in part for the *poetical* reality of the following  
lines

You love, remaining peacefully,  
To hear the murmur of the strife,  
But enter not the toil of life

## ALFRED TENNYSON

You are the evening star, alway  
    Remaining betwixt dark and bright.  
Lull'd echoes of laborious day  
    Come to you, gleams of mellow light  
    Float by you on the verge of night  
                                    *Margaret, II, p 21*

5 Tennyson feels deeply that all things (*qua* sensed) point unceasingly to one and a simple *cause*—in which 'the senses mix', 'the passions meet', and from which they 'radiate' This is, as I maintain, the very principle of unity and creativeness I am speaking about—an ever-original *freedom*, in which we know both indeterminacy and form as the twofold aspect of one irreducible reality In this luminous centre all values and shades of values now 'mix', now 'meet'—i.e., they are identified with each other, they *unite*—and now, in their 'extremes', vitally interplay

Wild bird, whose warble, liquid sweet,  
    Rings Eden thro' the budded quicks,  
    O tell me where the senses mix,  
O tell me where the passions meet,

Whence radiate fierce extremes employ  
    Thy spirits in the darkening leaf,  
    And in the midmost heart of grief  
Thy passion clasps a secret joy

*In Memoriam, LXXX, p 271*

It seems to me that we may recognize in these lines most unmistakably the *man* Tennyson, and his poetry, and his philosophy There his distinct philosophical contribution lies—and not, or to a far lesser degree, in the allusions to religious problems which we frequently find in his poems and in his conversations, as related in the valuable volumes by his son Hallam<sup>1</sup> Indeed Tennyson, as regards his typical philosophical position, might be misjudged (cf below, § 14), but, in these quoted lines, pointing (in a dubitative form) to a supreme *knot of values* in subjective activity, there is expressed a central and harmonizing

<sup>1</sup> *Alfred Lord Tennyson A Memoir*, by his son 2 vols Macmillan, 1897

## ALFRED TENNYSON

thought, which in fact tempers and enlightens all his utterances, and his very life. Moreover, we find ourselves here more surely within the competence of poetical insight.

6 The following image contains the description of the death of a lamb—through the poet's deep identification with it:

And in the flocks  
The lamb rejoiceth in the year,  
And raceth freely with his fele,  
And answers to his mother's calls  
From the flower'd furrow. In a time,  
Of which he wots not, run short pains  
Thro' his warm heart, and then, from whence  
He knows not, on his light there falls  
A shadow, and his native slope,  
Where he was wont to leap and climb,  
Floats from his sick and filmed eyes,  
And something in the darkness draws  
His forehead earthward, and he dies

*Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind*, p. 5

We seem to get near to life's first and last element—to know as it were *naked* life, and to know it in its widest aspects, universally characterized and not merely human (cf. Chapter I, § 19). At the same time, through this our intimate identification with widely differing forms of life, an ethical value of universality also is elicited, namely, the pity for the innocent blood. Though Tennyson here means to say that the lamb has no foreknowledge of his death and suffers only 'short pains'

7 As regards the rescuing of the qualitative element from the subordinate place which prose tends to give it—while propping it upon a *thing* (i.e., upon an *objectively* conceived existent, either material or ideal), the following passages may be quoted

[he] remember'd one dark hour  
Here in this wood, when like a wounded life  
He crept into the shadow

*Enoch Arden*, p. 130

## ALFRED TENNYSON

The word 'life' is not supported by an objectively conceived thing, rather it supports the participle ('wounded') Its very indeterminedness enhances its meaning

Maud the delight of the village, the ringing joy of  
the Hall,

*Maud*, I, 18, p 288

'Joy' is not a thing, either material or ideal, determined, non-potential It is not a general, abstract noun It is a *concrete universal*, in which the subjective moment (in its inexhaustible meaning) is powerfully, though only implicitly, asserted

8 'A maiden' is represented 'in the day' 'when first she wears her orange-flower',

When crown'd with blessing she doth rise  
To take her latest leave of home,  
And hopes and light regrets that come  
Make April of her tender eyes,

And doubtful joys the father move,  
And tears are on the mother's face,  
As parting with a long embrace  
She enters other realms of love,

*In Memoriam*, XL, p 257

The perfectly adequate expression, however essential, would be of no avail, were it not that, by means of it, many a highly indeterminate value—expressed for its own sake only—and the doubtful transition from one affection into the other, are made present and self-sufficient These give the passage spiritual lightness and breadth

9 As an example of an image which some may assume to possess 'as an image', and only as such, its poetical value, let us quote the following

Side by side beneath the water  
Crew and Captain lie,



ALFRED TENNYSON

There the sunlit ocean tosses  
O'er them mouldering,  
And the lonely seabird crosses  
With one waft of the wing

*The Captain*, p 116

But here we are suddenly made aware of a reality of ultimate and, probably, of cosmic significance—which surely we would not know at the simple view of the landscape itself. The 'one waft of the wing' depicts not only the bird, but thought's swift power of synthesis, its transparency, at once infinite and circumscribed.

10 The following passages are directly concerned with the concept of freedom

His resolve  
Upbore him, and firm faith, and evermore  
Prayer from a living source within the will,

*Enoch Arden*, p 137

Freedom (if the 'living source' is meant to describe it) lies deeper than deliberate will. It lies 'within the will', it constitutes and sustains it. And there is in freedom humility (a value of universality)—if 'prayer' means humility.

Your pride is yet no mate for mine,  
Too proud to care from whence I came

*Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, p 49

'Pride', in the first line quoted, is prejudice, in the second line (cf 'too proud') it is life original, creative, possessing in itself value, responsible for it, reacting against derivative causes, overcoming them, in one word, free.

The man should make the hour, not this the man,

*Queen Mary*, II, 2, p 600

This is hardly to be reconciled with the too easily asserted and quite uncritical point of view, which derives everything from heredity and surroundings, and leaves nothing to individual beings—nothing to man's *bona fide* opinion that he contributes

## ALFRED TENNYSON

something, however little, to the course of events and to his own behaviour. Freedom—a value of *potency*, as I understand it, unpredictable, opposing sheer conditionality—is a fundamental factor in history. Moreover, it is desirable that it should be so (cf. 'should make the hour') if conscience, spirit, are to be saved.

Should banded unions persecute  
Opinion, and induce a time  
When single thought is civil crime,  
And individual freedom mute,  
Tho' Power should make from land to land  
The name of Britain trebly great—  
Tho' every channel of the State  
Should fill and choke with golden sand—

Yet waft me from the harbour-mouth,  
'You ask me, *why, tho' ill at ease*', p. 64

Cf. *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, p. 220. Compare Chapter VIII, § 7.

Tennyson means also to prove inferentially that freedom is a reality. Were it not so, he points out, remorse would be but a lie, Nature herself a liar (*The Promise of May*, II, p. 789). On the other hand, he does not consider freedom as the thing intelligible *par excellence*, the key to our mental values, rather he sees in it something obscure, or mysterious (cf. *In Memoriam*, Prologue, p. 247: 'Our wills are ours, we know not how'). He is inclined to connect it with a transcendent world. Yet he does not make it at all an *unknowable* reality.

11 The following passages are of special interest as regards truth, either intrinsic or external, and the very principle of truth, and the poet's task with reference to it.

To search thro' all I felt or saw,  
The springs of life, the depths of awe,  
And reach the law within the law .  
*The Two Voices*, p. 32

ALFRED TENNYSON

but what am I?  
An infant crying in the night  
An infant crying for the light  
And with no language but a cry  
*In Memoriam*, LIV, p 261

There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds  
*Id*, XCVI, p 274

One shriek of hate would jar all the hymns of heaven  
*Sea Dreams*, p 160

Here, in the last line quoted, the common principle of charity and of truth (cf Chapter VIII, § 9) reveals itself. The moment of truth and love indistinguishable is expressed, again, in the passage

. . . in her heart she yearn'd incessantly  
To rush abroad all round the little haven,  
Proclaiming Enoch Arden and his woes,  
*Enoch Arden*, p 138

Tho' truths in manhood darkly join,  
*In Memoriam*, XXXVI, p 257

Cf above, § 5

Where truth in closest words shall fall,  
truth embodied in a tale  
Shall enter in at lowly doors

*Id*, *id*

The tales of Tennyson contain in fact these 'truths', not as an object of teaching (though the idea of vindicating them cannot be sundered from their expression) but as an immanent cause of his poetry. These 'truths' are original spiritual values—in their conflict with conventionality, idolatry, absurdity and blind pride. They formed in fact the vital leaven of the literature, especially the novels, of the last century (indeed of all time, but in this respect the nineteenth century is unparalleled—if we except only the Gospels).

## ALFRED TENNYSON

12 A vision of the Spring, in his poem 'Nothing will Die' (p 2), suggests to Tennyson the idea that Nature's life will never cease to be, and that 'the world was never made'—presumably because its ever-renewing principle is too intimately characterized, for its coming into being to depend on second causes or on an arbitrary act of will. However, the possibility of a doubt about this seems foreshadowed

I dream'd there would be Spring no more,  
That Nature's ancient power was lost  
*In Memoriam*, LXIX, p 264

Yet the passage is not especially concerned with this problem. Rather it seems to reflect, in its poetical value and reality, a feeling which we find sometimes expressed in Tennyson's poems—the fading away of memories (*Id*, CI, p 276), the losing of our hold on life (cf *Aylmer's Field*, p 151, cf also above, § 6), a 'weird' unreality of things (cf *The Princess, a Medley*, V, p 203)

13 He is confident about there being a meaning in history and in nature's fierce processes (if the following line represents, as it seems, his own view)

Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose  
runs,

*Locksley Hall*, p 101

Compare the last lines of 'In Memoriam'—where a less immanental conception of evolution is expressed

And one far-off divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves  
*In Memoriam*, CXXXI, p 286

On the other hand it is remarkable how Tennyson finds crude and forcible expressions also to depict the darker aspect of life and nature and for the fearless (however, in his view, only provisional) interpretation of their meaning

ALFRED TENNYSON

Are God and Nature then at strife,  
That Nature lends such evil dreams?  
So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life,  
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,  
'So careful of the type?' but no  
From scarped cliff and quarried stone  
She cries, 'A thousand types are gone  
I care for nothing, all shall go  
Thou makest thine appeal to me  
I bring to life, I bring to death  
The spirit does but mean the breath  
I know no more'

*In Memoriam*, LV, LVI, p 261

'What hope', then, 'of answer, or redress', for him  
Who trusted God was love indeed  
And love Creation's final law ?  
*Id* , LVI, p 261

For nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can  
heal,  
The Mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd  
by the shrike,  
And the whole little wood where I sit is a world of  
plunder and prey

*Maud*, IV, 4, p 290

But pity—the Pagan held it a vice—was in her and in me,  
Helpless, taking the place of the pitying God that should  
be!  
Pity for all that aches in the grasp of an idiot power,  
*Despair*, VIII, p 545

The last lines quoted are meant to refer to the 'God' of a 'fatalistic creed' (*Id* , IV, p 545), yet this limitation could hardly destroy their force. Value ('pity') is here asserted in its immanent

## ALFRED TENNYSON

character, so much the more through its 'helplessness' In the following passage, King Arthur sees that his realm 'reels back into the beast, and is no more', and (referring to God) he says

I found Him in the shining of the stars,  
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,  
But in His ways with men I find Him not  
*Idylls of the King, The Passing of Arthur, p 467*

14 A *transcendent* interpretation of the supreme reality—conceived as exceeding our possibilities of knowledge, and as of a quite different nature from ours, though spiritual—is suggested in the following passage

Earth, these solid stars, this weight of body and limb,  
Are they not sign and symbol of thy division from Him?  
*The Higher Pantheism, p 239*

Compare, however, in the same poem

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and  
feet

*Id*, p 239

Tennyson seems to be inclined to admit that the supreme reality entirely transcends *value*, as we know it. He definitely opposes reason and knowledge to faith, and 'senses' to the 'soul' (cf, e g, *Idylls of the King, To the Queen*, p 475). He is not eager to bring to a fuller significance the terms 'reason', 'knowledge', 'vision', 'sense'—to rescue them from their weaker meaning, to acknowledge the *claim for truth* which lies deep in them. A highly conservative instinct seems to lie in his transcendentalism. He denies time's ultimate reality (cf *The Ancient Sage*, p 549). And this, I presume, is not without connection with the fact that time represents, in his view, above all transitoriness and decay (cf *Id*, *id*). He says that 'deed and song' are 'in vain', unless we admit the immortality of the individual ('except the man himself remain', cf *Epilogue*, p 570). Personal immortality is foremost in his thoughts. Yet it would be wrong to regard him as a typical representative of that mental attitude in which transcen-

## ALFRED TENNYSON

dentalism, as is often the case, joins with a strongly ethical-utilitarian view, conservative and anthropocentric. In his rich personality—and also in that of his hero, King Arthur—this one-sidedness does not appear (Cf. above, §§ 5, 10 and 11.) Deep self-obliviousness inspires his verse. Moreover, views of decidedly immanent character are also expressed in his poems.

The man, that only lives and loves an hour,  
Seem'd nobler than their hard Eternities

*Demeter and Persephone*, p. 846

It may be noticed that this poem is, we may assume, one of his latest—published in 1889, and the following belongs to the same period.

If the lips were touch'd with fire from off a pure Pierian  
altar,

Tho' their music here be mortal need the singer greatly  
care?

Other songs for other worlds! the fire within him would  
not falter,

Let the golden Iliad vanish, Homer here is Homer there

*Parnassus*, p. 872

Yet again, this idea, namely that his laborious days leave not a rack behind them, does not entirely satisfy the poet—nor the very soul of song. The poet, as Tennyson represents him, wants to hope that his work may bear 'further thought and deed'

having sown some generous seed,  
Fruitful of further thought and deed,  
To pass, when Life her light withdraws,

*The Two Voices*, p. 32

## Chapter XIII

### EMILY JANE BRONTE

1818-1848

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THE NOVELS AND POEMS OF CHARLOTTE, EMILY, AND ANNE BRONTE, 'The World's Classics', Oxford University Press, 1933 (first edition, 1906)

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We cannot be satisfied by saying that infinity is most forcibly expressed in the last poem of Emily Bronte—it *is* there in its full reality

O God within my breast,  
Almighty, ever-present Deity<sup>1</sup>

Vain are the thousand creeds  
That move men's hearts unutterably vain,  
Worthless as withered weeds,  
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one  
Holding so fast by thine infinity,  
'No coward soul is mine', II-IV, p 406

The reality which is expressed by the word 'infinity' lies ultimately in the deep intrinsic nature, felt as such, of an originally active principle. And it is this deeply felt *intrinsicity* that constitutes the very foundation of Emily Bronte's conviction that this active principle, as she says in the last stanza of the poem, will never cease to be

The two lines immediately following the passage just quoted might lend themselves to an interpretation which, in my opinion,



## EMILY JANE BRONTË

would not be consonant with the poem itself in its entirety, I mean the words,

So surely anchor'd on  
The stedfast rock of immortality  
*Id*, IV

(Cf also stanza II, 'As I—undying Life—', stanza VI, 'Every existence would exist in Thee') These lines could be interpreted in the sense that Emily Brontë had there in view the endless survival of the individual, rather than the 'immortality' of God or indeed of a Creative Principle, with which she feels herself identified. I think that such allusion to a Personal Immortality would be quite out of tune with the immense afflatus of the poem. No doubt man's survival after bodily death constitutes a subject worth reflection and careful study, but there she is identified with a higher reality

With wide-embracing love  
Thy spirit animates eternal years,  
Pervades and broods above,  
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears  
Though earth and man were gone,  
And suns and universes ceased to be,  
And Thou wert left alone,  
Every existence would exist in Thee

There is not room for Death,  
Nor atom that his might would render void

*Id*, V-VII, p 407

The problem we are chiefly concerned with is this: Can the creative principle, of its own accord, cease to be? My opinion is that it cannot.<sup>1</sup> It can always, in each of its moments or realizations, be *more* or *less*. And in fact all its intrinsic aspects are characterized by the actual value of this very *possibility*. But, on the other hand, it arises immediately as a need to be. It aspires, it tends intrinsically, to be. And this qualification—this vocation to be—is not a limit but the very soul of freedom.

But, if this creative and ever-potential life is bound, by life's

<sup>1</sup> Cf my work *Il concetto dell'indeterminazione*, §§ 56, 58

## EMILY JANE BRONTE

original freedom itself, to a kind of immortality—what does that matter? Why that feeling of glory in our being identified with it?

What is its Destiny? Could it not, in given conditions, suffer degradation or actually cease to be—and hopelessly begin again and again? Or who says it could not, for instance, in this world of ours, or in the universe, have only attained the level of a perhaps unambitious vegetable life?

And yet, on the other hand, once we admit this original quality of being—which contains within itself the very principle of intelligence, and is actually a cause in natural processes—who can set limits to its power? And—shall we presume that we are the highest form of intelligence in the universe, or on this planet?

However this may be, Emily Brontë's poem testifies that the source of this *glory*, and of her faith, lies in the creative power itself

Her faith is not warranted by anything external. Can it be deceptive? It may be that it maintains less than it promises, or than we expect. But it is not an illusion. Her faith is shown, in this poem, as that which has its source in the inmost nature of an originally active principle. It is the subject of poetical insight—and it is disclosed as being born of the feeling of a primal and intrinsic character of mental activity. To refer this feeling to economic or social or subconscious or physiological causes would be sheer idolatry, and crass ignorance, unless firstly the logical and poetical fertility of this supposed *illusion* were closely investigated and explained or discounted.

The inward experience of the active principle as original and self-characterized, and, in a sense, self-necessary, does not *prove* its eternity and its universality *de facto*—but compels us to assume them as highly reasonable hypotheses. Again, this rich and most powerful characterization does but dimly enlighten us as to future events and destinies. But it would be quite unjustified to maintain that this feeling of something primal and intrinsic and creative in mental activity is concerned only with inward reality and value, and has no legitimate bearing on cosmological problems.

## Chapter XIV

GEORGE MEREDITH

1828-1909

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THE POETICAL WORKS OF GEORGE MEREDITH, *Constable, London*, 1928 (first published 1912)

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1 It is by stripping life of anything either distinctly human, or superhuman and un-earthly, that Meredith thinks he can reach and grasp it in its very principle, in its deepest spontaneity, the more surely and the more widely. He seeks *actualization*—as a primal force—in a quite elemental contact with matter, as far as possible, in its nudity, free from all accretions. This may be recognized, for instance, in the expressions

Of the yearning to touch, to feel  
The dark Impalpable sure,

*A Faith on Trial*, p. 354

The greed to touch, to view, to have, to live

*Earth and Man*, XVIII, p. 242

His breath of instant thirst

*Id.*, IV, p. 240

The rôle of the material frame of this world of ours in all spiritual utterances, or achievements, is emphasized

love gains  
Vitality as Earth it mates,

*The Thrush in February*, p. 331.

## GEORGE MEREDITH

2 Meredith extols *colour* and sees *spirit* in it. This fits in with his grateful and passionate exaltation of nature or of the 'Earth' in its visible aspects, no less than with his immanent conception. He says about colour almost the same thing as Shakespeare about music (cf. Chapter I, § 29) ('He', in the following passage, means 'colour' )

He is the heart of light, the wing of shades,  
The crown of beauty never soul embraced  
Of him can harbour unfaith, soul of him  
Possessed walks never dim

*Hymn to Colour*, VIII, p. 363

Colour represents here, is identified with, the maximum of *expression*. To bring the grey to the height of colour means an intense contemplative attitude, value immanent, a disinterested joyance in the medium of expression. Colour lends itself admirably to constituting, at one and the same time, (1) realization, form 'he' (colour) is 'the soul's bridegroom' (cf. *Id.*, VI),

He gives her homeliness in desert air,  
*Id.*, VII, p. 363

and (2) indeterminacy, infinity 'he' 'throbs rapture'

near an end that aye recedes,  
Because his touch is infinite and lends  
A yonder to all ends

*Id.*, VII, p. 363

The employment of *colours* in Meredith's poetry is especially remarkable

Nor had saffron and sapphire and red  
• Waved aloft to their sisters below  
*The Day of the Daughter of Hades*, III, p. 206

('their sisters' these colours as reflected in the lake at the first dawn of day )

This Earth of the beautiful breasts,  
Shining up in all colours aflame,  
*A Faith on Trial*, p. 350

## GEORGE MEREDITH

Sent the word Liberty up to meet the midway blue,  
*The Revolution*, III, p 469

3 The immanent causal principle is conceived and seen by Meredith, all through living nature, above all as creative joy. He says about Nature ('she' refers to 'Nature')

Seeing she lives, and of her joy of life  
Creatively has given us blood and breath  
For endless war and never wound unhealed,  
*Sense and Spirit*, p 182

In the line,

O skylark! I see thee and call thee joy!  
*To a Skylark*, p 55

'joy' does not stand for a composite concept, nor for something merely derivative, a mere result, it means a reality which is to be found again and again in its different forms, characterizing them, a reality *ex principio* (cf below, § 5)

4 The concept of *inward* or *immanent purposiveness* is vividly pointed out

So flies desire at view of its delight,  
*Ode to Youth in Memory*, p 404

The object of our action (as here represented) is not an extrinsic object, it is not an *object* at all. It (namely, this 'delight') is the real active subject. In nature's liveliest spontaneity, the subject and the object—i.e., the 'desire' and the 'delight'—have no distinct existence.

I chanced upon an early walk to spy  
A troop of children through an orchard gate  
The boughs hung low, the grass was high,  
They had but to lift hands or wait  
For fruits to fill them, fruits were all their sky  
They shouted, running on from tree to tree,  
And played the game the wind plays, on and round  
'Twas visible invisible glee  
Pursuing,

*The Orchard in the Heath*, p 238

GEORGE MEREDITH

We cannot ultimately distinguish the 'visible' from the 'invisible glee' and claim that the former, the 'visible' and 'pursuing' glee' is the only acting subject they are identified one with the other, as forms or moments of the same original cause, free of, unburdened with, the subject-object-means distinction

In the bare effort to attain a definite given object, dead, abstract, bereft of original value, in the abstractly purposeful attitude of mind, life's profound spontaneity fails to be found, its source and its greatness are lost sight of, are absent The immanent final cause in life's activity is not described by the 'goal', or by the 'aim', but by a 'goad' which is at the same time a 'lure', and by a 'trust', and an 'aspiration'

Life is both a lure and goad

*The Three Singers to Young Blood*, p 237

I fled nothing, nothing pursued

The changeful visible face

Of our Mother I sought for my food,

Bore life for a goad, without aim

*A Faith on Trial*, pp 349, 350.

Spirit raves not for a goal

it trusts,

Uses my gifts, yet aspires,

Dreams of a higher than it

*Id*, p 359

Compare also 'The Wild Rose and the Snowdrop'

Twin-born, albeit their seasons are apart,

They bloom together in the thoughtful heart,

For each, fulfilling nature's law, fulfils

Itself and its own aspirations pure,

Living and dying, letting faith ensure

New life when deathless Spring shall touch the hills

Each perfect in its place, and each content

With that perfection which its being meant

*The Wild Rose and the Snowdrop*, p 8

## GEORGE MEREDITH

The 'balm' of 'Earth's primary heart at its active beat' is

simple as morn and eve  
Treasureless, fetterless,

*Alsace-Lorraine*, p 306

This image is born of and describes the very moment of creative novelty (cf 'at its active beat'), it describes this moment as simple, transcending objective multiplicity, infinite, infinitely impersonal, not bound to possession ('treasureless'), not imprisoned by conditions and means and, especially, by fixed, pre-conceived thoughts and ends (cf 'fetterless')

He asks Nature to teach him to love the transient 'season' disinterestedly, to find his life justified, supported and thoroughly explained by it—and by the innermost faith which lies deeply in nature herself

Great Mother Nature<sup>1</sup> teach me, like thee,  
To kiss the season and shun regrets

*Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn*, p 176

His pantheistic poetry is genuine, because it is in full earnest, and plausibly, the healing and blessing power is attributed to nature, recognized in her

The voice of nature is abroad  
This night, she fills the air with balm,  
Her mystery is o'er the land,

*South-West Wind in the Woodland*, pp 25-26

A thing of Nature am I now,  
Abroad, without a sense or feeling  
Born not of her bosom,  
Content with all her truths and fates,  
Ev'n as yon strip of grass that bows  
Above the new-born violet bloom,  
And sings with wood and field

*Pastorals*, III, pp 50-51

5 However, in my opinion, value's immanent purposiveness is pre-eminently found in Art, unmixed—rather than more generally in nature. By laying stress on nature's life, a high thought

## GEORGE MEREDITH

of universality, 'free of taint of personality' (to use Meredith's words, cf *The Lark Ascending*, p 223), may be elicited. But, on the other hand, we seem to find *in nature* a hard demiurge, together with the original and actual value and hostile to it. Be this as it may, it is worth pointing out that Meredith discovers this very principle of inward purposiveness and of deep spontaneity in art as well. For indeed the motive-value of his poetry lies in it—in its self-expression, in its discovery—rather than in any subject whatever in which it may be suggested or in which it may be prevailingly realized.

O Muse, that in all sorrows and all joys,  
Rapturous bliss and suffering divine,  
Dwellest with equal fervour, in the calm  
Of thy serene philosophy, albeit  
Thy gentle nature is of joy alone, .

*The Shipwreck of Idomeneus*, p 73

The last line, as I understand it, points—rather than to a general character of expression or form, which in themselves could not define art<sup>1</sup>—to a *spiritual lightness*, the concept of which I have tried to elucidate and in which *inward purposiveness*, superseding all extrinsic processes, is the chief element.<sup>2</sup>

Then with wonderful voice that rang  
Through air as the swan's high death,  
Of the glory of Light she sang,  
She sang of the rapture of Breath

She sang of furrow and seed, .  
O, the song in its burden ran pure,  
\*And burden to song was a crown

*The Day of the Daughter of Hades*, VIII, pp 214-15

Meredith—intent as he was in expressing and knowing a value of intrinsic purpose in life's spontaneity—was likely to rivet his attention to this word 'burden' in this meaning. In fact the 'burden' is at one and the same time (1) the *problem*, the un-

<sup>1</sup> Cf Chapter XVIII, § 1

<sup>2</sup> Cf Chapter I, §§ 30-4, and *Index*



## GEORGE MEREDITH

determined, most comprehensive moment, contributive to the general thought (cf 'ran pure'), and (2) the *answer*, the culmination and justification of the song, its form pre-eminently (cf 'was a crown') It means a bond—a responsibility—which is, at one and the same time, the very wing of freedom It expresses an infinite longing, which is born of actualization itself It is inseparably an efficient and a final cause—or neither of them, if we conceive them according to a merely, abstractly, objective scheme of reality

6 The formative process, which Meredith recognizes or supposes all through the wide world of living nature, this formative process 'at its active beat' perpetually constitutes—notwithstanding its elementary character—a rich unity, a principle of endless kinships, an essential keynote precisely in the sense in which *original causality*, provided it is conceived at all, is such a unity In the following passage, Meredith refers to nature's elemental powers, which he sees or hears, or of which he is aware, in the woodland

For every elemental power  
Is kindred to our hearts, and once  
Acknowledged, wedded, once embraced,  
Once taken to the unfettered sense,  
Once claspt into the naked life,  
The union is eternal

*South-West Wind in the Woodland*, p 26

The following extracts refer to the legendary Greek physician and naturalist, Melampus

For him the woods were a home and gave him the key  
Of knowledge,

*Melampus*, II, p 227

And thus he deemed might be boon of love to a breast  
Embracing tenderly each little motive shape,

*Id*, III, p 227

## GEORGE MEREDITH

Where others hear but a hum and see but a beam,  
The tongue and eye of the fountain of life he knew

*Id*, VIII, p 228

All senses joined  
nature and song allied

*Id*, XIII, p 230

the studious eye that reads  
In links divine with the lyrical tongue is bound  
*Id*, XIV, p 230

In 'The Lark Ascending' the same concept-value of a never-failing creative novelty, which Shelley expresses in its full significance in his poem 'To a Skylark', is more analytically described (cf lines 8-12 of the following extract) Yet it is only with the last six lines quoted that we are here especially concerned

. up he wings the spiral stair,  
A song of light, and pierces air  
With fountain ardour, fountain play,  
To reach the shining tops of day,  
So thirsty of his voice is he,  
For all to hear and all to know  
That he is joy, awake, aglow,  
Shrill, irreflective, unrestrained,  
Rapt, ringing, on the jet sustained  
Without a break, without a fall,  
Perennial,  
Too animate to need a stress,  
The starry voice ascending spreads,  
Awakening, as it waxes thin,  
The best in us to him akin,  
The woods and brooks, the sheep and kine,  
He is, the hills, the human line,  
The meadows green,

*The Lark Ascending*, pp 221, 222

Meredith lays stress on a fundamental unity of the 'senses' 'all senses joined' (*Melampus*, p 230, quoted above), 'we hear in seeing' (*A Garden Idyl*, p 526), 'Great artists pass our single

## GEORGE MEREDITH

sense' (*Id*, *id*) The question however is whether this unity originates in a common ever-renewing quality, which, though in rudimentary forms, is found in the sensations themselves, or, on the other hand, depends on something which is altogether superadded to them. I think that Meredith inclines towards the first conception, and this may be confirmed by the following passage

Sensation is a gracious gift,  
But were it cramped to station,  
The prayer to have it cast adrift  
Would spout from all sensation

*The Question Whither*, II, p. 339

7 Indeed Nature—her wide and rich world, her ancient voice, Pan the musical god—has a prominent part in Meredith's poetry, in his discovery and representation of an elementary beneficent Power, but this part must not be overestimated. It is a principle of inner light, a quite unambiguously *subjective* reality, that eventually draws our attention

Whatsoever I am and may be,  
Write it down to the light in me,  
I have made my choice to proceed  
By the light I have within,  
Having nought but the light in me,

*In the Woods*, II, pp. 342, 343.

The dream is an atmosphere,  
The scale still ascending to knit  
The clear to the loftier Clear  
'Tis Reason herself, tiptoe  
At the ultimate bound of her wit,  
On the verges of Night and Day

*A Faith on Trial*, p. 359

'Dream' stands here for the subtlest and supreme reality of thought. It describes, if my interpretation is true, creativity itself in its *potential*, non-objectified moment, free from all bonds (cf. above, § 4, the passage quoted from *Alsace-Lorraine*) 'Dream'

## GEORGE MEREDITH

is, in other terms, 'reason', 'at the ultimate bound of her wit', striving to transcend her very self, in order to attain the true and spiritual *objectivity*, i.e., an all-inclusive identity with the real, exploring in the absolute new

G M Trevelyan, though not exactly referring to this passage, yet, no doubt, alluding to this same reality, essentially indivisible, says that it 'belongs to that mysterious and formless part of mental experience which it is the proper task of the poet in this workaday world to set before us in all its natural mystery, lest we should all of us become statisticians or dogmatists'<sup>1</sup> These words 'mysterious', 'natural mystery', in Trevelyan's argument, are justified, for they emphasize that this intensive *something*, which essentially transcends external objectivity, must not be explained away by belittling it, and they seem to imply that we are not concerned with mere mechanical processes. It is, no doubt, in some sense, a mysterious reality, but—it is clearness itself, as Meredith says. Unsophisticated people find this clearness—or simplicity, or infinity—actual and intelligible in *freedom* itself, and they understand that it is, as G M Trevelyan points out, a fundamental reality. Externally minded critics turn up their noses in disdain, if the words which depict it are used without being shorn of all claim to truth.

8 The following passage well illustrates the full force and meaning of 'truth'—in the sense of inward or intrinsic truth (cf Chapter IX, § 16)

False and fair! I scarce know why,  
But standing in the lonely air,  
And underneath the blessed sky,  
I plead for thee in my despair,—  
For thee cut off, both heart and eye  
From living truth, thy spring quite dry,

Song, p 28

The concept, again, of intrinsic truth—an ever-known and ever-unknown, inexhaustible truth, essentially a deepening—is vividly touched upon in the lines

<sup>1</sup> *The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith*, by George Macaulay Trevelyan, p 73 London, 1906

GEORGE MEREDITH

but strange  
When it strikes to within is the known,  
Richer than newness revealed

*A Faith on Trial*, p 351

9 As one who looks for a primal truth in the multifarious world of forms, Meredith has lost something of the sureness, and easy joy, of those who are satisfied with love of single things or with the pursuit of definite objects of practical activity. But there is a serenity in the ampler truth of the essence. And this is reflected sometimes in the very rhythm of his poetry, for instance

He who has looked upon Earth  
Deeper than flower and fruit,  
Losing some hue of his mirth,  
Unto him shall the marvellous tale  
Of Callistes more humanly come

*The Day of the Daughter of Hades*, I, p 205

Frailer than flower when the round  
Of the sickle encircles it strong  
To tell of the things profound,  
Our inmost uttering song,

*Id*, X, p 217

With love exceeding a simple love of the things  
That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck,  
*Melampus*, I, p 227, cf *Id*, XV

10 Opposite mental attitudes, which radically belong to the intrinsic nature of thought, are expressed. The externally objective moment

. to beaks deliberate, formal, assured, precise  
*Alsace-Lorraine*, VII, p 513

But who shall expound to a hard cold eye  
The infinite impalpable?

*By the Rosanna*, p 109

## GEORGE MEREDITH

To an 'icy Huntress' (cf *The Test of Manhood*, p 544, and *With the Huntress*, p 531), which seems to impersonate external action and crude, blind overcoming of actual value, he opposes a 'Persuader', 'Maid, woman and divinity', 'Life's flowering, Life's root' (cf *With the Persuader*, p 532),

Nature's earliest Power,  
And greatest and most present,

*Id* , p 538

But, obviously, Meredith's poetical insight, especially on this subject of essential oppositions in human attitudes, should be pursued in his novels

11 *Love in the Valley* It is worth while pointing out that this poem, which is undoubtedly one of Meredith's most inspired poems, is also most remarkably, and exceptionally, clear (cf. in this connection, Chapter XI, § 1)

Under yonder beech-tree single on the green-sward,  
Couched with her arms behind her golden head,  
Knees and tresses folded to slip and ripple idly,  
Lies my young love sleeping in the shade

*Love in the Valley*, p 230

Objective reality is absorbed into simpler elements, which belong to a superior reality *Infinity* finds its expression in the 'sleep' (cf Chapters I, § 16, VIII, § 8) and in the 'shade' *Form*, which atones for it and answers its call, finds through colours and weight its primary want fulfilled, cf also 'the beech-tree single', 'her golden head' *Intrinsic purposiveness* (cf above, § 4), a lingering value, self-sufficing, is expressed by the words 'to slip and ripple idly' These elements are intelligibly and infinitely *true* of the original essence The inspired lines possess an unborrowed clearness, which is that of the spirit

Shy as the squirrel and wayward as the swallow,  
Swift as the swallow along the river's light  
Circling the surface to meet his mirrored winglets,  
Fleeter she seems in her stay than in her flight

## GEORGE MEREDITH

Heartless she is as the shadow in the meadows  
Flying to the hills on a blue and breezy noon  
No, she is athirst and drinking up her wonder  
Earth to her is young as the slip of the new moon  
Deals she an unkindness, 'tis but her rapid measure,  
Even as in a dance, and her smile can heal no less  
Like the swinging May-cloud that pelts the flowers with  
hailstones  
Off a sunny border, she was made to bruise and bless

*Id*, p 231

An almost pagan conception of nature's innocence—i.e., of the very originality and intrinsic necessity of nature's inmost cause—allows for the expression of a penetrating and wide thought of universality (cf. above, § 1). The third line of the second stanza quoted ('she is athirst and drinking up her wonder'), expresses, again, a value of intrinsic or immediate purposiveness, a primary gift of grace and form, which finds its *cause* in the very act of being. These radical modalities seem to constitute a more inviolable value, and purer, than other deeper and richer identities in the essence, and responsibilities, which Christian love discloses.

Stepping down the hill with her fair companions,  
Arm in arm, all against the raying West,  
Boldly she sings, to the merry tune she marches,  
Brave in her shape, and sweeter unpossessed  
Sweeter, for she is what my heart first awaking  
Whispered the world was, morning light is she

*Id*, p 232

We know no greater and more real moment than that of actualization in its delicate, first becoming, intimate and revealing (cf. the two last lines). Its value lies above all in its *virginity*, that is to say, in its indeterminacy, or *potency*, as a positive reality (cf. 'sweeter unpossessed'). We find everywhere this intimate *becoming*, this creative novelty, in this very moment of its highest possibility and comprehensiveness, and creativity, exalted in poetry. This proves how utterly false is the denial of time (i.e., of the *becoming*) from the point of view of value. Meredith from

GEORGE MEREDITH

the very first (cf 'my heart first awaking') was possessed with this truth

Busy in the grass the early sun of summer

*Id*, p 234

We may say that Meredith—who knew that 'love' 'gains' 'vitality as Earth it mates'—was bound to produce, in one of his happiest moments, the best example of alliteration and onomatopoeia joined together

Fairer than the lily, than the wild white cherry

Fair as in image my seraph love appears

*Id*, p 236

An image shows thought's self-substantial reality—as a thing does not, when viewed especially in its objective aspect (cf 'the lily', 'the wild white cherry') This thought's superior reality is made evident in the quoted lines

Different and extreme moments of indeterminacy are realized in the following images

Maiden still the morn is, and strange she is, and secret,  
Strange her eyes, her cheeks are cold as cold sea-shells

*Id*, p 232

(Cf Chapter I, § 11, the passage quoted from *Troilus and Cressida*)

Darker grows the valley, more and more forgetting .

*Id*, p 231

Darkness drops not from the skies,  
But shadows of darkness are flung o'er the vale  
*The Longest Day*, p 75

'the nightingale with charmed power  
Poured forth enchantment o'er the dark repose  
Earth's mists did with the sweet new spirit wed

Far up the sky with ever purer beam,  
Upon the throne of night the moon was seated,  
And down the valley glens the shades retreated,  
*Song*, p 29



## Chapter XV

### ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

1837-1909

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SWINBURNE'S COLLECTED POETICAL WORKS Two Volumes,  
*Heinemann*, 1935 (First Edition, 1924)

1 *Form* The word 'form' has manifold, sometimes opposite meanings (1) Form may be identified with actualization, i.e., self-realization, or (2) with the *formative* principle itself, in all its implications (3) The moment of the complete realization, that of the full-blown flower, may be brought into special prominence (4) A self-centred, exclusive or all-oblivious character in actualization itself may be emphasized (5) Form as formed, divisible, not *active*, and a world of external relations between objectified existents may be pointed out Sometimes the word 'form' lays stress on one of these aspects without excluding the others, rather implying them to a certain extent—and I hardly need to apologize for the shifting use of the word, for even such is the character of the reality it expresses

The opposition between 'form' and 'content' belongs to a less essential point of view and generally, with regard to poetic or artistic activity, it reflects a false and misleading conception. Indeed *form*, in the deeper meaning of sensuous realization, is, as I hope I have made evident, such a germ of deeply related values, that all the tumult of life is contained in it. It is itself the richest content. The 'content', which is opposed to form, generally refers to abstractly conceived ideas which have hardly anything to do with the artistic expression and with its real conceptual

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

value The deeper meaning of the word 'form' is lost sight of, again, in that use of the word in which it is opposed to 'colour' and represents volume or outline This distinction may point out different methods of expression, but, according to a deeper and more fruitful use of language, *colour* is *form* pre-eminently (cf Chapter XIV, § 2), and, on the other hand, drawing and sculpture exceed *form qua* limited no less than colour does

The following passage reveals form as a value of actualization

The gospel graven of life's most heavenly law,  
Joy, brooding on its own still soul with awe,  
A sense of godlike rest in godlike strife,  
The sovereign conscience of the spirit of life

*Tristram of Lyonesse, VIII, Vol II, p 119*

Form (cf 'Joy', 'The sovereign conscience ') is an original, intrinsically characterized principle Its reality *qua* principle is immanent in it (cf 'Joy, brooding on its own still soul ') Its primal character is felt in its highly indeterminate aspect (cf. 'still', 'awe'), yet form—as a value of actualization and of immanence—is uppermost

2 Form as an original principle may be found, again, in the attainment of a wide and ever wider *presence*—or span of consciousness In the following passage, form, in this sense, seems to be conceived as the prevailing element The perpetual and omnioriginal character of love's (and song's) self-dependent principle is also expressed

And in their skies would sunlike Love confuse  
Clear April colours with hot August hues,  
And in their hearts one light of sun and moon  
Reigned, and the morning died not of the noon  
Such might of life was in them, and so high  
Their heart of love rose higher than fate could fly

*Id, VI, II, p 94*

This very concept of a subtly spun, wide and powerful, sensible unity is frequently met with in Swinburne's poetry (cf *Thalas-*

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

*sus*, I, p 594, *Tristram of Lyonesse*, VIII, II, p 113, see below, § 25) 'Fate', cf §§ 24 and 38

3 Language and artistic expression disclose the formative principle in all its aspects, but most generally contain a value of actualization and immediate sensuous presence. The following extracts refer especially to 'speech' and art—and to form in its deeper sense. An immanent interpretation of reality is asserted.

For no thought of man made Gods to love or honour  
Ere the song within the silent soul began,  
Nor might earth in dream or deed take heaven upon her  
Till the world was clothed with speech by lips of man  
*The Last Oracle*, I, p 303

Cf *Id*, p 305. The reviving power of song, healing and redeeming, and ultimately real, is constantly referred to.<sup>1</sup> Compare also the passage

For, sparing of his sacred strength, not often  
Among us darkling here the lord of light  
Makes manifest his music and his might  
*Ave atque Vale*, I, p 351

It would betray, however, human pride, a one-sided, anthropomorphic view, to recognize this reviving power of *form* only in song or in speech. The last words of the following passage say that it does not belong only to them.

For these are thine, thy servants these, that stand  
Here nigh the limit of the wild north land,  
At margin of the grey great eastern sea,  
Dense-islanded with peaks and reefs, that see

<sup>1</sup> Cf *The Last Oracle*, l 24, I, p 302, *In the Bay*, XXXIII, ll 1-2, I, p 315, *Memorial Verses on the Death of Théophile Gautier*, ll 35-36, I, p 355, *The Pilgrims*, I, pp 765-6, *The Statue of Victor Hugo*, 3, ll 7-8, II, p 630, *Id*, 9, ll 6-7, II, p 632. Cf below, § 25.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

No life but of the fleet wings fair and free  
Which cleave the mist and sunlight all day long  
With sleepless flight and cries more glad than song  
*Tristram of Lyonesse*, VI, II, p 87

4 In the following passage, joy is felt and represented as the central motive-force in the inmost genetic process in which spirit is at once realized and revealed

Eye might not endure it, but ear and heart with a  
rapture of dark delight,  
With a terror and wonder whose core was joy, and a  
passion of thought set free,  
Felt only the rising of doom divine  
*The Death of Richard Wagner*, III, p 550

Freedom and freedom's infinity are represented as aspects of an original joy (cf 'whose core was joy') This joy appears to play the first rôle, to be pre-eminently the cause

Compare, in this connection, the following extracts

the fruitful might  
And strong regeneration of delight  
That swells the seedling leaf and sapling man,  
Since the first life in the first world began  
*Tristram of Lyonesse*, I, II, p 26

Was all their joy of life shaken to dust,  
*Id*, VIII, II, p 113

Only the might of joy in love  
*The Tale of Balen*, II, p 179

5 Swinburne's idea of value as immanent—neither utilitarian, nor conventional, nor transcendental, nor abstractly inferred, but intimately known—is expressed all through his poems, but in 'Tristram of Lyonesse' most happily, *ex abundantia cordis* ('Tristram of Lyonesse' must be regarded, in the first place, as a necklace of lyrical songs, and is, in my opinion, by far the best of his poems) The life of his hero is that of one who lives in the

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

full spirit of joy—a joy which is radically generous—and of truth

And the spring loved him surely, being from birth  
One made out of the better part of earth,  
A man born as at sunrise, one that saw  
Not without reverence and sweet sense of awe  
But wholly without fear or fitful breath  
The face of life watched by the face of death,  
And living took his fill of rest and strife,  
Of love and change, and fruit and seed of life,  
And when his time to live in light was done  
With unbent head would pass out of the sun

*Tristram of Lyonesse, III, II, p 62*

Value's full realization in the fleeting moment, and joy, again, and radiancy of forms, are depicted in the following image Tristram 'felt the sound' 'of waves', 'like a song',

Sink through his spirit and purge all sense away  
Save of the glorious gladness of his hour  
And all the world about to break in flower  
Before the sovereign laughter of the sun,

And all these things he glanced upon, and knew  
How fair they shone, from earth's least flake of dew  
To stretch of seas and imminence of skies,  
Unwittingly, with unpresageful eyes,  
For the last time

*Id, VIII, II, pp 126, 129*

6 We have seen value's immanence<sup>1</sup> in contemplative joy (cf § 1), in expression (cf § 3), in *courage* (§ 5) and in other shades of meaning We shall see it in value's self-purposive (§ 27) and self-causal (§ 33) character, and in its very fleetingness (§ 10), and also in an extreme aspect of sterility (§ 31) Swinburne vindicates value immanent—i.e., present, original, intrinsically

<sup>1</sup> The concept of the immanence of value—the immanence of *being*, of the deepest being, in actualization—coincides with that of the *form* in its various meanings, except that of form *qua* formed, passive

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

characterized, that knows in its very actuality its intrinsic or *eternal* character—he vindicates it above all against utilitarian attitudes of mind and the idolatry of the permanent for permanence's sake, and against abstract theism. Thus he says that love subsists also under the course of God,

In the utmost hell whose fires consume not love<sup>1</sup>

*Id.*, V, II, p. 80<sup>1</sup>

This is the conception expressed by Dante in the Fifth Canto of the 'Inferno'. But it is against Dante's deep-rooted and more explicit thought that, in the Canto of Francesca da Rimini, love imposes and, as it were, proves its inward nature, and seems to triumph even over God's condemnation. And this makes the all-embracing and all-defying power of love perhaps more convincing and real. Similarly, this very concept of immanence constantly inspires the Canzoniere of Petrarch: namely, that all pleasures could never be equal in worth to love's anguish, that this lies beyond and above any joy, any pain and any profit or result whatever. Petrarch's utterances, again, may gather greater rather than less strength from the very fact that he, *in his prose thought* (whether in his Latin prose or in his poems themselves), asserts conservative ethics, namely, that his praise of love is nothing but foolishness and that it is absurd to prefer transitory things to joy everlasting. Swinburne starts from the conviction that the opposite view is true. Hence it is, perhaps, that it is not to the same degree that this very truth reveals itself by its own virtue and for its own sake alone. The burden of concepts, which have been previously discovered or admitted by the poet and have now become abstract ideas in the poet's mind, may always clip the wings of poetry. Yet the importance of this fact must not be overestimated. It is not the preconceived thought which ultimately prevents poetry from taking wing, or value from being self-active and self-revealing.

7 Our suffering, striving, agonizing humanity, that which emphatically belongs to our earthly experience, is accordingly

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also *Laus Veneris*, I, p. 26, *Tristram of Lyonesse*, V, II, pp. 80, 82, 83, *Id.*, IX, II, p. 143.

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

stressed as essential to love's strongest passion—to raise value itself to its richest and highest meaning Yseult, from the depth of her pain, asks Christ whether he could love Magdalen indeed as Magdalen loved him

Ah, Lord, Lord,  
Shalt thou love as I love him? she that poured  
From the alabaster broken at thy feet  
An ointment very precious, not so sweet  
As that poured likewise forth before thee then  
From the rehalloved heart of Magdalen,  
From a heart broken, yearning like the dove,  
An ointment very precious which is love—  
Couldst thou being holy and God, and sinful she,  
Love her indeed as surely she loved thee?

*Id*, 1d

8 Swinburne sees also in sheer power and pride<sup>1</sup> an infinitely original value Compare, for instance, the lines

The inalienable and unpriced treasure,  
The old joy of power, the old pride of pleasure,  
That lives in light above men's lives

*Age and Song*, I, p 364

See below, § 31 'Pride' and 'Power' (in this sense) are in themselves antagonistic to all deep value of universality and tend to annul it This passage and many more, in which Swinburne even more emphatically, and certainly in a one-sided, excessive way, extols self-centredness and pride as spiritually positive values, could be considered as quite secondary, and negligible, in his main poetical contribution But contemporary events, which have spread through Europe ignominy and unspeakable horror, rivet our attention upon all utterances which, in this respect, jar upon both our ethical and aesthetic feeling

I do not take into account those who, to their own condemnation, belittle or ignore Swinburne's poetry But this must be admitted There is a shade of *pride* in his poetry, which pro-

<sup>1</sup> Cf above, § 1 (4)

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

foundly affects it I do not necessarily mean personal, or national pride, but a pride which lies in his very language, and weakens his words Even in the moments of his highest self-detachment, he seems to be almost always conscious of his own power

Undoubtedly, Swinburne's attitude on some subjects was chiefly polemical—a reaction against prevailing false views Moreover, he lived in a golden age, I think, and had not seen 'the foulness of the real thing' But, in part, his attitude had a deeper cause, and was closely connected with a comparatively less profound spontaneity in his poetry And this one-sidedness of his raises an arduous and indeed not at all gratuitous problem How can spirit be one-sided while awake in its most fervid freedom? It is as if nature had exhausted herself, striving in one direction—for a high intellectual harvest and display of her treasures

9 *Indeterminacy* From the point of view of mere external existence, the following sentence would appear almost a truism, and hardly worth uttering ' For if death were not, then should growth not be' (*Genesis*, I, p 778) Besides, the argument would be objectionable, for we may easily suppose an endless addition of elements not conditioned by any destruction whatever But *growth* implies *simplicity* Growth, according to an organic, not mechanical interpretation of reality, implies an indeterminate moment—not only a world of objectively existent elements, not only a relation of necessity between objective conditions, but an intensive something, which is not translatable in terms of objective multiplicity It carries within itself a halo of virginity, an extreme purity, a moment of utter formlessness It implies renewing—and with it a positive and powerful moment, which is felt, and described, as 'death' both because of its highly indeterminate character, and because of the overcoming of the manifold and the destruction of the particular forms as such The idea of 'death', as essentially a constituent part of life, may not be entirely absent in the sentence above quoted It is certainly present in the line, which I have italicized, of the following passage



ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

But if my soul might touch the time to be,  
If hand might handle now or eye behold  
My life and death ordained me from of old,  
Life palpable, compact of blood and breath,  
*Visible, present, naked, very death,*  
Should I desire to know before the day  
These that I know not, nor is man that may?

*Tristram of Lyonesse, V, II, pp 82, 83*

The expression 'very death', as it is here used, could not be understood, except in the light of the concept just mentioned. This 'death' belongs to life's *active beat* itself, bestripped of all appurtenances, which are not life itself (cf 'naked') Life in the very act of its actualization (cf 'visible', 'present') knows death-like extinction, most immediately and universally, in its radical *simplicity*. Indeed it knows *death-like extinction* and approaches factual death in many a way—but this seems to me the particular meaning, or shade of meaning, of the above-quoted expression.

In the following image, 'death' depicts self-obliviousness and self-transcendency. The 'hour' of 'twilight's doors unbarred' lets Tristram and Yseult

Watch with sweet thoughts of death the death of day  
*Id, VII, II, p 105*

Self-obliviousness indeed, in its deeper and stronger meaning, is self-transcendency—self-transcendency in and through an infinitely original cause, felt as such. Self-obliviousness, in the passage quoted, both informs the rhythm of the verse and transfigures the landscape.

'Death' is not factual death. Compare, in this connection, the following extract:

Slowly the semblance of death out of heaven descends  
on the deathless  
Waters

*Evening on the Broads, II, p 473*

Life and time are overshadowed by this 'semblance of death' (the disappearance of the world of forms, of external multipli-

. ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

city), no less than by the changeless change of a quasi-mechanical world

10 I must recall the general concept (cf Chapter I, § 4) the lover dies to himself and, in that very moment, finds a purer birth, in which the primal and intrinsic or *eternal* character of self-activity, that is to say, of the creative moment, is revealed to him. And this birth is felt as death and, in a sense, is death, because of the surrender of the self and because it approaches formlessness. This radical truth finds in the landscape a fit means of expression, it is not forced upon it. Its very vividness and significance atones for its being attributed to objective existents, which have no subjective reality known to us. Compare, in this connection, the following images

As a star feels the sun and falters,  
Touched to death by diviner eyes  
*At a Month's End*, I, p. 326

And as the young clouds flamed and were undone  
About him coming, touched and burnt away  
*Tristram of Lyonesse*, I, II, p. 27

surely as the day-star loves the sun  
And when he hath risen is utterly undone,  
*Id*, III, II, p. 55

(Cf Chapter XII, § 2)

As the dawn loves the sunlight I love thee,  
As men that shall be swallowed of the sea  
Love the sea's lovely beauty, as the night  
That wanes before it loves the young sweet light,  
And dies of loving, as the worn-out noon  
Loves twilight, and as twilight loves the moon  
That on its grave a silver seal shall set

*Id*, II, p. 54

We have seen that the word 'death'—in so far as it describes an essential moment in the originality of thought—has manifold meanings. Now we have found it again as seemingly

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

another name for a never-failing ultimate simplicity in life's very process (cf § 9) But in the passage last quoted, and in Swinburne's poetry generally, a distinct new aspect emerges The transitoriness of the all-absorbing moment is by Swinburne extolled as a value in itself It is not only an essential aspect of creative novelty It not only expresses value as absolutely immanent It is a moment of sadness—no less than a moment of glory—under the heaven of fate, mortifying, as it seems, immanent value itself and all that is human and living It has an almost religious character

11 The effacement of the self and its absorption into life's inmost principle (cf 'the heart's desire') finds its most direct expression in respect of poetical inspiration

A spirit of sense more deep of deity,  
Keen as the heart's desire  
That makes the heart its pyre  
And on its burning visions burns itself to death  
*The Garden of Cymodoce*, I, pp 622, 624

See §§ 24, 25, cf *Mater Triumphalis*, l 93, I, p 807

12 The landscape itself is, in the following passage, pre-eminently the subject-matter Yet it is the same essential concept-value that, in part, gives imagination its hues and constitutes its very web and substance

round the running prow  
Fluttered the flakes and feathers of the spray,  
And bloomed like blossoms cast by God away  
To waste on the ardent water,  
*Tristram of Lyonesse*, I, II, p 26

Except for the living truth we are considering, the word 'to waste', especially, would not have its convincing meaning or, most probably, would not have been suggested at all

In the following lines, indeterminacy and form are opposed At the same time, they are represented as two aspects of one principle, each enhancing the other's meaning

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Long lay they still, subdued with love, nor knew  
If star or moon beheld them, if above  
The heaven of night waxed fiery with their love,  
Or earth beneath were moved at heart and root  
To burn as they, to burn and bring forth fruit  
Unseasonable for love's sake,  
And all that hour unheard the nightingales  
Clamoured, and all the woodland soul was stirred,  
And depth and height were one great song unheard,

*Id*, II, II, p 52

The words 'still', for instance, and 'nor knew', 'unheard', and again 'unheard', 'to burn', express the moment of indeterminacy, 'to bring forth fruit', 'clamoured', 'song', reflect that of form. The first moment is similarly expressed in the following passages

Out of the heaven that storm nor shadow maïs,  
A yearning ardour without scope or name  
Fell on them,

*Id*, II, p 50

She had nor sight nor voice, her swooning eyes  
Knew not if night or light were in the skies,

*Id*, *id*

13 The poet doubts, on one occasion, the ultimate reality of such a moment, which contains life and death, or lies between them—in which the infinity of original freedom is destroyed by freedom's very actualization, and this, in its turn, by a dreary dissatisfaction that seems to lie deep in actualization itself

Ah, sweet is that or bitter, evil or good,  
That very love allays not as he would?  
Nay, truth is this or vanity, that gives  
No love assurance when love dies or lives?

*Id*, V, II, p 81

14 We are eventually met with the metaphysical problem  
Which is the *first*—or which is the only causative, or the pre-

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

eminently causative moment—in the inner play of the actual cause? Is it *form* (actualization, 'joy'), or, on the other hand, is it *indeterminacy* (infinity, *potency*)?

Love, is it morning risen or night deceased  
That makes the mirth of this triumphant east?

O which is elder, night or light, who knows?

*Id.*, I, II, p. 31

'Night', we may assume, is not intended to mean chaos, or matter. The problem, provided the words are used in their *subjective* meaning, is of great significance, not only from an intimate but also from a cosmological point of view. If *form* (cf. 'light') is causally the *first*, then an immanent or only relatively transcendent interpretation of reality is suggested. But if *infinity* (cf. 'night'), as a spiritual value, were essentially independent of form, a timeless God and abstract theism could be asserted.

15 'Night' is again a name for indeterminacy—as a central, vital moment in mental activity. It is certainly not a negative concept. Compare the following passages:

I have seen this, who live where men are not,  
In the high starless air of fruitful night  
On that serenest and obscurest height  
Where dead and unborn things are one in thought  
And whence the live unconquerable springs  
Feed full of force the torrents of new things

*Tiresias*, I, pp. 838, 839

('Night' is referred to )

begun

When none knows,  
Self-begotten, self-proceeding, one,  
Born, not made

*By the North Sea*, VI, II, p. 518

Blind is the day and eyeless all its light,  
But the large unbewildered eye of night  
Hath sense and speculation,

*Tristram of Lyonesse, Prelude*, II, pp. 11, 12

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

And light is born out of heaven and dies,  
And one day knows not of another's light,  
But night is one, and her shape the same  
*A Lamentation, II, I, p 98*

In this respect 'night' is most like 'griefs'

Joys that joys estrange, and griefs that griefs  
estrange not  
*Epicede, II, p 1084*

Again, in this respect, it is most like 'silence' and all-comprehensive 'love'

Till more and more as darkness grows and glows  
Silence and night seem likest life and love  
*After Sunset, II, II, p 643*

Night infinite, living, adorable, loved of the land  
and the sea  
*Loch Torridon, II, p 1011*

New-made night, new-born of the sunset, immeasurable,  
endless,  
Opens the secret of love hid from of old in her heart,  
In the deep sweet heart full-charged with faultless love  
of the friendless  
Spirits of men  
*Evening on the Broads, II, p 475*

Compare *Nocturne, I, p 451*

16 The idea of death, again, and that of purity and of a purer birth are, from the same logical and ontological point of view, closely and quite intelligibly related Let us quote, in this connection, the following lines

But love lacks might to redeem or undo me,  
I will go back to the great sweet mother,  
Mother and lover of men, the sea

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

O fair green-girdled mother of mine,  
Sea, that art clothed with the sun and the rain,  
Save me and hide me with all thy waves,  
Find me one grave of thy thousand graves,  
*The Triumph of Time*, I, pp 41-3

Yours was I born, and ye,  
The sea-wind and the sea,  
Made all my soul in me  
A song for ever,

*Ex-Voto*, I, p 378

17 Sorrow is closely associated with a non-mechanical view of reality. It shows, in its very intensity, something which is immediately and peculiarly *potential*, therefore indivisible and unlimited

In the infinite spirit is room  
For the pulse of an infinite pain

*Satia te Sanguine*, I, p 87

Sorrow overshadows and absorbs our world *infinitely*. Its infinity is not timeless, even from an intimate and absolute point of view, for it is essentially *active*. James Thomson (1834-88), in his poem 'Insomnia', says: 'The absolute of torture as of bliss Is timeless, each transcending time and space'<sup>1</sup> If these words were taken literally, either they would imply absolute transcendentalism or, I am convinced, they simply would mean loose thinking. Swinburne, on the other hand, never forgets the element of time (cf § 36), which here the word 'pulse' puts into relief.

The following images express sorrow's infinity—and other motive-values connected with it

And as the cry of slain men was the wind

And all her soul was as the breaking sea,

<sup>1</sup> *The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems*, 1899, p 152

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

And all their past came wailing in the wind, .

*Tristram of Lyonesse*, V, II, pp 81, 82

. in the halls far under sat King Mark,  
Feasting, and full of cheer, with heart uplift,  
As on the night that harper gat his gift

But the queen shut from sound her wearied ears,  
Shut her sad eyes from sense of aught save tears, .  
And the night spake, and thundered on the sea,  
Ravening aloud for ruin of lives

but she

Heard not nor heeded wind or storming sea,  
Knew not if night were mild or mad with wind

*Id* , II, pp 76-8

In the manifold sound remote,  
There was but a sharp sole note  
Alive on the night and afloat,  
The cry of the world's heart's wrong

*Tenebrae*, I, p 749

18 The word 'light' varies its meaning *a parte subjecti*, most like the word 'form', but, unlike this, it also expresses the creative moment in its highly indeterminate aspect. Generally, in Swinburne's poetry, either it is another word for the active principle itself (cf below, § 32), or it points to actualization in its full power and richness (almost like the word 'day'). But sometimes it describes form exclusive or, on the other hand, form passive, merely a screen which prevents a deeper or wider insight. Or, again, 'light' means neither clearness and richness of forms, nor unlimited transparency, but the delicate, doubtful moment between them. Here are some fragments in which the term is used according to its various meanings, except the first and second more usual ones now mentioned.

Soft as darkness and keen as light

*Loch Torridon*, II, p 1013

We, from the fetters of the light unbound,

*Tristram of Lyonesse*, *Prelude*, II, p 11



ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

All heaven aflush with light more dire than shade  
*Thalassius*, I, p 598

But the light is dense as darkness, a gift withheld in  
the giving,  
No transparent rapture, a molten music of colours,  
No translucent love taken and given of the day  
*Evening on the Broads*, II, p 477

From the shadow that trembles and yearns with light  
*A Nympholept*, II, p 975  
light more soft than shadow,  
*A New-Year Ode*, II, p 878

But here, where light and darkness reconciled  
Hold earth between them as a weanling child  
*In the Bay*, V, I, p 308

These kinships of meaning describe the deeper logic of thought  
They do not simply consist of associations of ideas or mental  
presentments, conceived as the result of external causal relations  
and habits!

19 Yet it is the idea, or image, of *virginity*—rather than that of  
'death' and of 'night', and of 'silence', or than any of the con-  
cepts above mentioned—that comes nearest to the meaning of  
indeterminacy and most adequately expresses it The *locus*, so to  
say, of indeterminacy must be sought for in the uncompromised  
moment of the first and newest becoming

Swinburne is passionately fond of depicting this very initial  
moment It is not easy to make a choice of passages containing  
its distinct expression

Nor woke they till the perfect night was past,  
And the soft sea thrilled with blind hope of light  
*Tristram of Lyonesse*, II, II, p 53

Delight and doubt in sense and soul begun,  
*Id*, III, II, p 65  
ere

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Day gat full empire of the glimmering air,

*Id*, V, II, p 76

For in the trembling twilight of this year

Ere April sprang from hope to certitude

*Id*, VI, II, p 88

Be not too long irresolute to be,

*A Vision of Spring in Winter*, I, p 390

As sweet desire of day before the day,

As dreams of love before the true love born,

*Id*, I, p 391

For the thought of his heart is the sunrise

*Off Shore*, II, p 463

20 The moment of indeterminacy is described in a more explicit way (and no less creatively or poetically) in the following passage

Soul within sense, immeasurable, obscure,

From depth and height by measurers left immense,

Through sound and shape and colour, comes the unsure

Vague utterance, fitful with supreme suspense

*Plus Intra*, II, p 554<sup>1</sup>

The intrinsic purpose and *cause* of this moment is that of being all-embracing, infinite. Indeterminacy is shown in its infinite and, to all appearance, non-predeterminate character 'Unsure', 'vague', 'fitful'. These terms do not indicate fortuitousness. In fact fortuitousness has no value in itself but this is a 'supreme' value. Neither do they emphasize arbitrary will, for, again, as the last words of the passage explicitly confirm, this is a 'supreme' value. The moment is essentially felt as non-predeterminate, free, depending on its absolutely present intensity, on something which is, in the very present, essentially and immediately virtual 'Supreme suspense'. There is no similarity, obviously, between this 'supreme suspense' and that moment of thought's activity which is termed 'suspension of judgement'—unless 'suspension of

<sup>1</sup> *A Century of Roundels*, published in 1883

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

judgement' is conceived as being fundamentally a moment of responsibility and truth,<sup>1</sup> and not merely the cautious act of a controlling will

21 Swinburne's use of the word 'sense' (cf the passage above quoted) deserves special consideration 'Soul within sense', 'spirit in sense' (cf, for instance, 'The spirit in sense, the life of life', *A Reminiscence*, II, p 1067), 'spirit within sense', 'one soul of sense', and other similar expressions which frequently occur, do not oppose 'spirit' to 'sense', on the contrary, they are intended to point out 'sense' in its full significance, in its deepest nature. The expression 'spirit and sense' is also very frequently used, and these words, generally, are not opposed: they are meant to signify one and the same reality and indeed to integrate each other, as if each in itself were not sufficient to convey the full meaning. The idea is constantly stressed that 'Light, sound and life are one' (*On the Cliffs*, I, p 609. Cf *Hawthorn Tide*, II, p 1132 '... and the sense is a soul, and the soul is a song') Compare also the passage

a splendour of silence, felt  
Seen, and heard of the spirit within the sense  
*A Nympholept*, II, p 965

'Spirit' and 'sense' are slightly contrasted in the following lines 'Spirit' appears here to be more closely connected with *form*, 'sense' with infinity

Sense was none but a strong still rapture,  
Spirit was none but a joy sublime,  
*Les Casquets*, II, p 890

The word is less frequently used to mean the sense-limitations, which every specified organ of sense implies. Sense-limitations are then opposed to the deepest claim of life—and of sense itself. They withstand the supreme urge for an identity *ex principio* and, indirectly, they lend a means to its expression. In the following passage allusion is made to the fact that Yseult

<sup>1</sup> Cf Marcel Chicoteau, *Studies in the Ephectic Attitudes*, No 3. Priory Press, Cardiff, 1943

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

lives not far from the sea, where now Tristram is sailing towards  
Brittany

such a brief space eastward thence,  
And yet might soul not break the bonds of sense  
And bring her to him in very life and breath

*Tristram of Lyonesse, VIII, II, p 118*

22 The delicate and ample moment in which all shape is most  
'translucent' and deeply permeated with spirit, is sometimes re-  
presented by contrast with the final event, which is put into full  
prominence

Then with half summer in her eyes she turned,  
And on her lips was April yet, and smiled,  
As though the spirit and sense unreconciled  
Shrank laughing back, and would not ere its hour  
Let life put forth the irrevocable flower

*Id , I, II, p 27*

Yet was not love between them, for their fate  
Lay wrapt in its appointed hour at wait,

*Id , II, p 17*

The idea of an incumbent fate and of its accomplishment gives  
the image a stronger relief, in some respects, but it points to an  
extrinsic explanation of that very moment's value and power  
Cf also, in this connection, the passage

For all things come by fate to flower  
At their unconquerable hour,

*On the Downs, I, p 855*

23 The idea of a gradual change, in which the feeling of an  
intimate becoming is paramount, inspires Swinburne's poetry  
constantly. Indeed we find it vividly expressed also when birth,  
growth and development are not concerned. Compare the  
following extracts (in the first four the idea of growth and de-  
velopment is still reflected, but it is not to be found, obviously,  
in the last two)

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

The wind of change is soft as snow, and sweet  
The sense thereof as roses in the sun,

*Tiresias*, I, p 837

Surely by glad and divine degrees

*A Flower-Piece by Fantin*, II, p 591

From wave to gladdening wave,

*Quia Multum Amavit*, I, p 774

Across the darkling depths of their delight

*Tristram of Lyonesse*, II, II, p 49

In the month of the long decline of roses

*Hendecasyllabics*, I, p 202

Day seems to cling yet with a trembling hand

And yielding heart reluctant to recede,

*Tristram of Lyonesse*, VII, II, p 106

24 *Value above or beyond Personality* A high value of universality—an intimate demand for universality and truth—felt and meant as transcending all circumscribed human interests, is expressed in the following lines. It is embodied in their central idea and in the feeling which runs through them and sustains them, no less than in that which in them is asserted in a more articulate and argumentative way

O strong sun! O sea!

I bid not you, divine things! comfort me,

Who hath said ye have mercy toward us, ye who  
have might?

And though ye had mercy, I think I would not pray

That ye should change your counsel or your way

To make our life less bitter,

For if in life or death be aught of trust,

And if some unseen just God or unjust

Put soul into the body of natural things

And in time's pauseless feet and worldwide wings

Some spirit of impulse and some sense of will

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

That steers them through the seas of good and ill  
To some incognizable and actual end,  
Be it just or unjust, foe to man or friend,  
How should we make the stable spirit to swerve,  
How teach the strong soul of the world to serve,  
The imperious will in time and sense in space  
That gives man life turn back to give man place  
The streams flow back toward whence the springs  
began,  
That less of thirst might sear the lips of man?

*Tristram of Lyonesse, III, II, pp 57, 58*

It is the idea of fate that, in Swinburne's poetry, expresses the loftiest thought of universality, overshadowing all human interests and aspirations

Fate, that is pure of love and clean of hate,

*Id, IX, II, p 134*

And moved of no man's prayer to fold its wings,

*Id, id.*

'Under its sway 'joy' is found 'a shadow' 'and sorrow a breath'

And life no discord in the tune with death,

But all things fain alike to die and live

*Id, II, p 133*

25 The main source of Swinburne's poetry, in my opinion, is found in the expression or the foreshadowing of an original value which is felt as deeper and truer than our life and death, than the idol of happiness, and all especially human ends. It is found in a *core of causality* which lies either above or below, anyhow beyond personality.

Compare, in this connection, the following passage ('Thy' refers to the spirit of song embodied in Sappho—or in a bird—or in a Deity)

yet can no memory say

How many a night and day

My heart has been as thy heart, and my life

As thy life is, a sleepless hidden thing,

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Full of the thirst and hunger of winter and spring,  
That seeks its food not in such love or strife  
As fill man's hearts with passionate hours and rest  
From no loved lips and on no loving breast  
Have I sought ever for such gifts as bring  
Comfort, to stay the secret soul with sleep  
The joys, the loves, the labours, whence men reap  
Rathe fruit of hopes and fears,  
I have made not mine,  
We were not marked for sorrow, thou nor I,  
For joy nor sorrow, sister, were we made,  
*On the Cliffs*, I, pp 610, 611

Cf *Thalassius*, I, p 606

The following lines refer to the French poet Villon

Poor perfect voice, most blithe when most forlorn,  
*A Ballad of François Villon*, I, p 385

Shame soiled thy song, and song assoiled thy shame.  
*Id*, 1d

It must be recalled (see Chapter I, § 7) that the effacement of the particular self (cf, in the first line above quoted, 'forlorn') does not in itself constitute the real cause of this gladness (cf 'blithe') If our will is replaced by another will, be it that of the 'unconscious' or of Apollo himself, this does not account, intimately, intelligibly, for any value whatever 'Possession does not make for poetry'<sup>1</sup> Rather there is a redeeming power in that which is felt as primarily and infinitely formative and which radically belongs to our thought's very activity

Pure as the depth of pain  
*A Song of Italy*, I, p 926

'Pure' does not here signify only or in the first place an ethical value—that is to say, sorrow, or 'pain', as atonement for pride and privileges, and for all selfishness. It describes pain as a basic element in human personality, but wider than it and primordial

Life's inmost *core of causality* is felt as more real not only than

<sup>1</sup> John Middleton Murry, *Shakespeare*, 1936, p 341

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

the separate self, but than personality however conceived. When we are identified with it, 'death's self seems transitory' (*Song for the Centenary of Walter Savage Landor*, 7, II, p. 425). It is above all love and song that reveal to Swinburne this subtle yet 'mastering' reality. Compare the following passages:

With love for lamp to light us out of life  
*Tristram of Lyonesse*, IX, II, p. 144<sup>1</sup>

. . . we retain  
A memory mastering pleasure and all pain,  
A soul behind the soul, that seeks and sings  
And makes our life move only with its wings  
*On the Cliffs*, I, p. 611<sup>2</sup>

And with his heart again  
The tidal throb of all the tides keep rhyme  
And charm him from his own soul's separate sense  
With infinite and invasive influence  
That made strength sweet in him and sweetness strong,  
Being now no more a singer, but a song  
*Thalassius*, I, p. 605

26 The idea of an original power, as above represented, is closely connected with that of this power's omnipresence or, more properly, of its omni-originality, and with a pantheistic feeling. This finds rich and frequent expression, compare, for instance, the following passage ('He' refers to Merlin, 'his life' is 'sealed fast on him with sleep'):

. . . but in spring  
He hears above him all the winds on wing  
And knows the soul that was his soul at one  
With the ardent world's, and in the spirit of earth  
His spirit of life reborn to mightier birth  
And mixed with things of elder life than ours,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. in this most remarkable line, the use of the liquid consonant *l*, see *Index*, 'Alliteration and Onomatopoeia'

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, § 35, second passage quoted



ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

With cries of birds, and kindling lamps of flowers,  
And sweep and song of winds,

*Tristram of Lyonesse*, VI, II, pp 98, 99 <sup>1</sup>

27 *Intrinsic purposiveness* The image of the Wind, in the following lines, is born of and reveals the spiritual essence, as Swinburne conceives it, in one of its fundamental aspects ('He' refers to the wind )

The delight that he takes but in living  
Is more than of all things that live  
For the world that has all things for giving  
Has nothing so goodly to give  
But more than delight his desire is,  
For the goal where his pinions would be  
Is immortal as air or as fire is,  
Immense as the sea

Though hence come the moan that he borrows  
From darkness and depth of the night,  
Though hence be the spring of his sorrow,  
Hence too is the joy of his might,  
The delight that his doom is for ever  
To seek and desire and rejoice,  
And the sense that eternity never  
Shall silence his voice

That satiety never may stifle  
Nor weariness ever estrange

Nor change be so great as to change  
His gift that renews in the giving,

*By the North Sea*, II, pp 513, 514

Cf also

the sleepless unsatisfied breeze,  
That finds not, but seeking rejoices  
That possession can work him no wrong

*Id*, II, p 515

<sup>1</sup> Cf *Id*, II, pp 99, 100, *Anactoria*, I, pp 63-6, *Memorial Verses on the Death of Théophile Gautier*, I, p 356, v 18, *By the North Sea*, II, p 524

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Comparing these with Meredith's words on a similar subject (see Chapter XIV, § 4), we find that here in some respects the purpose (cf 'goal') is objectified and strongly emphasized as such—though remote Intrinsic purpose—which is at one and the same time a present value and a *cause*—is more purely and intimately expressed in the following passage

But higher than transient shapes or shows  
The light of love in life inflamed  
Springs, toward no goal that these disclose  
*Eros*, II, p 585

28 Faith is coessential with self-activity and value, intrinsic to them, cf the line

That faith in love which love's self gives,  
*A New-Year's Message*, I, p 798

It lies in the very present and intelligible nature of the spiritual essence Obviously, it is not meant as a dogmatic one This Swinburne calls a 'faithless creed' (cf *A Word from the Psalmist*, II, p 952, cf also *Athens*, II, p 614) It lies deeper than hope (cf *A Year's Burden*, I, p 883, *Jacobite Song*, II, 1102) The word 'hope' is also used as meaning a higher faith (cf *Thalassius*, I, pp 596, 597 'And hope the high song taught him')

29 Intrinsic purposiveness—or value as self-purposive, immanent—is shown in its moral significance

Not for gain of heaven may man put away the rule of  
right  
*The Altar of Righteousness*, II, p 1158.

See above, § 6 Cf also the following extract ('She' refers to England)

She, loving light for light's sake only,  
And truth for only truth's, and song  
For song's sake and the sea's, how long  
Hath she not borne the world her lonely  
Witness of right and wrong?  
*The Commonweal*, XXVII, I, p 476

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

30 If we say that we seek a thing for that thing's sake only, it may also occur that we use, or abuse, an expression which is either unconvincing and one-sided, or ambiguous. For instance, by saying, 'existence for mere existence's sake', we do not certainly convey the idea of value's immanence, but quite an opposite one. By saying, 'Art for Art's sake', the idea of art as an objectified end, limited and exclusive in its abstraction, may be suggested, and often, when 'Art for Art's sake' is discussed, the meaning of this very expression shifts from one conception to quite an opposite one. By saying, 'truth for truth's sake', if truth were intended as an extrinsic end, an *object*, the force of the expression would be lost, or the conception expressed would be one which is far from emphasizing the very immanent spirit of truth. Indeed the man who seeks truth extrinsically, as an object given, is generally one who shows rather a strong external will—and a hundred times over converts himself from one creed to another, and finds nothing. In the expression, 'pleasure for pleasure's sake', we are inclined to understand pleasure as slightly objectified. One thing is pleasure *active* (cf Chapter XVII, § 9), quite another is objectified pleasure. We read, for instance, of 'the amount of pleasure' which is found in a work of art. Perhaps it is thought that this form of expression is more objective and scientific. Not only taste, but scientific exactness, should prevent us from such a use of the word.

The concept, which the above mode of expression chiefly brings into prominence, occurs most frequently in Swinburne's poetry, meaning intrinsic purposiveness and implying spirit and its fundamental integrity—unless a one-sided viewpoint is emphasized as such and thereby, to a certain extent, discounted (cf § 31). Nothing one-sided is found, for instance, in the following passage:

When the might of the summer  
Is most on the sea,  
When the days overcome her  
With joy but to be,

*Off Shore*, II, p. 460.

Cf *Loch Torridon*, II, p. 1014, l. 2

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

The general conception concerned is most forcibly expressed in the following extracts from 'Hertha':

Though sore be my burden  
And more than ye know,  
And my growth have no guerdon  
But only to grow,

*Hertha*, I, p 737

I bid you but be,  
I have need not of prayer,  
I have need of you free  
As your mouths of mine air,  
That my heart may be greater within me, beholding  
the fruits of me fair

*Id*, I, p 738

Was not I enough beautiful?  
Was it hard to be free?

*Id*, I, p 739

The concept of intrinsic purposiveness implies that the distinction between subject, object and means is not primary in consciousness. This fundamental truth is reflected also in Swinburne's poems and vividly, though implicitly, signified (cf, e.g., § 25, the last passage quoted, l 6) <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the concept of intrinsic purposiveness, again, in Swinburne's poetry, cf below, § 33

31 *The Pagan World* I use the word 'pagan' only symbolically and for brevity's sake. Some distinct features of the twofold value of form and indeterminacy, and, more generally, of original causality, may be gathered in the poems, or part of them—depicting 'sin', and pleasure, and a world of lighter love and responsibility—which belong to a comparatively earlier period of Swinburne's poetical activity.

We may say (with no allusion to Swinburne) that, for instance, alcohol and drugs can *provoke* a feeling of infinity. But all the crass ignorance of modern scientism is needed to make us believe that such absurdly heterogeneous causes may constitute or ex-

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

plain this feeling Swinburne's position is most like that of one who is sure to find—not, as Meredith, in elemental nature, but in an imaginary world of sin—a stronger ground to fight the idolaters, and a subject in which unequivocally to discover value's original and infinite character. While he rediscovers *value* in lower forms (or those considered as such), he escapes the general objections which are made against its highly constructed or its transcendental interpretations.

Pleasure is 'certain' (cf *Dolores*, I, p. 168 'The one thing as certain as death'), and this is meant, obviously, not only from a pragmatist but from a cognitive point of view. It is mysterious (cf *Id*, I, p. 158 'To the shrine where a sin is a prayer') It is primordial (cf *Id*, I, p. 160 'Since God bade the world's work begin') It is perpetual

. . . . .  
Thou art fed with perpetual breath,  
And alive after infinite changes,  
And fresh from the kisses of death,

*Id*, I, p. 156

It is mixed with death, even as love is—but death is more incumbent in it, is not, in some sense, superseded, looks closer and fiercer

Death laughs, breathing close and relentless  
In the nostrils and eyelids of lust,

*Id*, I, p. 166

Love sought for, let us say, in a reversed way, by starting from self-destruction, or from self-abjection (cf *Id*, I, p. 160, cf also *A Ballad of Life*, I, p. 3), or from the flesh (cf *Dolores*, I, p. 161 'Thou shalt quicken the soul through the blood'), is not attained in its full value, but, perhaps, more consciously

Self-realization as an end to itself (cf §§ 6, 30) becomes 'sterile' Cf *Id*, I, p. 156, and the passages

Thou whose rootless  
Flower is fruitless  
As the pride its heart encloses,

*A Song in Season*, I, p. 397

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Thou whose beauty  
Knows no duty  
Due to love that moves thee never,

*Id*, *id*

Yet that which is brought into sudden light, in these images,  
is the very reality of a deeper love This emerges, even more  
conspicuously, though likewise indirectly, in the passages

Ah beautiful passionate body  
That never has ached with a heart!

*Dolores*, I, p 157

On thy mouth though the kisses are bloody,  
Though they sting till it shudder and smart,  
More kind than the love we adore is,  
They hurt not the heart or the brain,

*Id*, *id*

Cf *Satia te Sanguine*, ll 29-32, I, p 87

Allusion is made to the time when 'the world's heart was  
lighter' (*Dolores*, I, p 162)—'When the Graces took hands with  
the Hours' (*The Last Oracle*, I, p 302) The concepts of spon-  
taneity and grace, and of an immanent purpose, more or less  
profoundly absorbing, are again involved Indeed, in Swin-  
burne's poetry, lightness, and heedlessness, seem to be turgid with  
rage, rather than serene However, let us quote in this connection  
(though not referring to anything especially pagan) the follow-  
ing passages

Above the sea and sea-washed town we dwelt,  
We twain together, two brief summers, free  
From heed of hours as light as clouds that melt  
Above the sea

Free from all heed of aught at all were we,  
Save chance of change that clouds or sunbeams dealt  
And gleam of heaven to windward or to lee

*Past Days*, II, p 544

Here, where the world is quiet,  
Here, where all trouble seems  
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot

*The Garden of Proserpine*, I, p 169

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

32 *The Actual Cause* I have considered some of the fundamental aspects of the *actual cause*, as represented in Swinburne's poems. But this all-radiating centre of activity—logically dependent, as I conceive it, on the fact of there being anything really *active* in subjectivity—is elicited even more directly. Swinburne searches for a name for it, tentatively

A soul that labours and lives, an emotion, a strenuous  
breath,

*Hymn of Man*, I, p. 756

It is 'many-named and single-natured' (*Athens*, II, p. 619)

The image of a flower happily conveys the idea of the one and the manifold. It appears to acquire a higher degree of reality, while implying and in some way symbolizing this fundamental concept

a flower more strong  
Than life or time or death, love's very rose of song  
*A New-Year Ode*, II, p. 878

Her whole soul's one great mystical red flower

*Tristram of Lyonesse*, I, II, p. 27

Spirit may be likened to a many-faceted gem. Yet this, if it is spirit, differs from a material gem, inasmuch as any aspect of it is immediately intelligible in each of its aspects. A landscape may show this relationship. It may disclose 'the word of the world', for its manifold aspects are made with 'light' and with 'darkness' (in the deeper subjective meaning of these words). Its manifold qualities are related through a 'likeness' and a 'kinship', which witnesses an original constancy in the intimate nature of thought

the scripture of light and of darkness, the word  
of the world,

*An Autumn Vision*, II, p. 990

Bore witness there to the soul of its likeness and  
kinship, above and below

*A Channel Passage*, II, p. 1119

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

The creative principle does not exist, according to an immanent interpretation, except in the very act of its self-realization. Besides, a medium of expression, or of actualization, is required, which is essential not only to the richness but to the very reality of the act itself, and is neither separable nor discernible from it.<sup>1</sup> The creative principle is

Indivisible spirit and blood, indiscernible body from  
soul

*Hymn of Man*, I, p 756

On the other hand—since its objective and dissectable moment does not constitute its very life—it is, in a sense, unreachable, and invisible. Moreover, it must be admitted that it exceeds, in some respects, its living form itself. Cf the following extracts

Invisible  
And visible.

*The Altar of Righteousness*, II, p 1142

Light, perfect and visible  
Godhead of God,  
God indivisible,

*Off Shore*, II, p 462

O natural force in spirit and sense, that art  
One thing in all things, fruit of thine own fruit,

And inextirpable thy viewless root  
*The Eve of Revolution*, 25, I, p 684

'Light' is another name for the spirit, compare, for instance, the penultimate passage quoted. Cf also the line

To strain insensual eyes toward increate light,  
*Tristram of Lyonesse*, V, II, p 82

<sup>1</sup> Objective multiplicity is essential, I hold, to the mental synthesis. And by 'mental' I understand all that is self-active, *subjective*. It is in accordance with this conception that I allowed myself to use the expression 'in-objective' (in which the preposition 'in' has an adversative meaning and implies an essential relation with objective multiplicity) instead of the words 'non-objective', 'trans-objective', 'infra-objective', 'non-spatial', which would convey quite false views.



## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

'Insensual' should not be understood, according to Swinburne's general conception, as if the 'spirit of sight' (to which it refers, and which is mentioned in the text in the lines immediately preceding) were radically distinct from sentiency and opposed to it. 'Increate' either should mean 'born, not made', ever self-originating, or that which has always been in its ever self-originating forms.

33 The very conception that value is original, i.e., ever self-originating, is most forcibly and explicitly expressed. Value (it is emphasized) is its own cause. Indeed this is implied in the idea that value is self-purposive: for inward purpose is just meant as that which is self-active, that is to say, that which is a *cause* with reference to itself. Yet this very central point, concerning value's inward causality, is more distinctly expressed and vindicated.

Love, that what time his own hands guard his head  
The whole world's wrath and strength shall not strike  
dead,

Love, that if once his own hands make his grave  
The whole world's pity and sorrow shall not save,  
*Tristram of Lyonesse, Prelude, II, p. 6*

Love that is fire within thee and light above,  
And lives by grace of nothing but of love,  
*Id., id.*

Love, that though body and soul were overthrown  
Should live for love's sake of itself alone,  
*Thalassius, I, 595*

Shrines or songs that the world's change wrongs  
not, live by grace of their own gift's grace  
*On the South Coast, II, p. 982*

'Gift' this word rightly points out the fact that the creative moment, or any of its aspects—its *simplicity*, for instance, or freedom itself—could never be constructed at will. On this subject in general, concerning a deep intimate causality in value, cf. above, § 25, especially the two last passages quoted.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

External and, on the other hand, original causality, are contrasted in the following passages

Mother, not maker,  
Born, and not made,  
*Hertha*, I, p 734

Was Love that nestling indeed that under the plumes  
of the night  
Was hatched and hidden as seed in the furrow, and  
brought forth bright?  
The beautiful bird unbegotten that night brought  
forth without pain  
*Hymn of Man*, I, pp 754, 755

That wrought the whole world without stroke of  
hand,  
*Tristram of Lyonesse, Prelude*, II, p 5  
(‘That’ refers to ‘love’)

Sprung of the sea without root,  
Sprung without graft from the years  
*Atalanta in Calydon*, II, p 274

34 Not a few of Swinburne’s poems are dedicated to children. He generally does not discover and signify, in any remarkable degree, in little children’s grace and wisdom, the indication of the self-characterized nature of mental activity, and of a *truth* which lies deeper than education, local conditions and heredity. He admiringly and untiringly describes their smiles and their tears as coming from Heaven—perhaps rhetorically. Yet the following passage clearly reflects the original element we are considering and contains words which perfectly fit in with its description.

All heaven, in every baby born,  
All absolute of earthly leaven,  
Reveals itself,

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Yet man might feel all sin forgiven,  
All grief appeased, all pain outworn,  
By this one revelation given

*Babyhood*, II, p 567

Cf also *A Child's Pity*, II, p 695

35 *Freedom* Freedom has a deeper, more essential and more comprehensive meaning than 'free-will' in the traditional acceptance of the word, which lays stress chiefly on deliberate judgment, control over feeling, abstract choice, and arbitrary will. Indeed free-will is only an instance, however conspicuous, of freedom.<sup>1</sup> Let us also point out (supposing there is someone who doubts it) that it is not a mere name which unites freedom as effort and, on the other hand, freedom as grace, as gift, as inspiration, as song. Freedom which is effort and freedom which is spontaneity have deep common characteristics. Both in freedom as free-will and effort, and in the very act of comprehension and love, there is non-predetermination, or anyhow, if we prefer, the feeling of something not absolutely predetermine. But anyone who is not entirely convinced of an essential non-predetermination of psychic activity will find another common characteristic, if possible even more fundamental. For both effort and love contain in the present moment, in its very simplicity or unity, the sense of a gradation of possibilities. That is to say that they overcome objective (though only ideal) multiplicity. Now let us keep well in mind that we could not see how objective multiplicity (even only ideal or mental) could ever be overcome, unless the overcoming be immediate in the act and thus be already possessed, at any given moment, with a sense of something gradual and virtual or potential, and therefore, *in embryo*, manifold. Hence freedom, which is precisely this sense of a gradation of possibilities, makes us understand how the synthesis of thought (either practical or cognitive) is possible, it lets us understand how the many-in-one—and the one-in-the-many—is possible. Freedom gives us the key to the *unity*—the unity in multiplicity. And he also who thinks that freedom is an illusion, ought to admit, however, that this *illusion* is the seed of all our psychic

<sup>1</sup> Cf my work *Il concetto dell'indeterminazione*, § 13 ff

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

life For the secret of the psyche lies in a *potentiality* which is active, real—and which does not oppose itself to *being*, but represents it in all its value and force And this value of potentiality is essential no less to grace (if it be not entirely gratuitous) than to effort

But if we had to make a choice and renounce one or the other use of the word, we should keep the word 'freedom' to signify that freedom which lies in any original value whatever, and which is more or less vividly felt, and immediately known, e g , in song, in love and in responsibility (which is akin to love) Freedom depicts the *active* principle most radically It means actualization, and at one and the same time it emphasizes in actualization the moment of indeterminacy—a value of *potency*, of infinity Moreover, deepening itself, freedom discloses the feeling of the intrinsic and universal character of its very principle—a value of intrinsicity (or *eternity*), which at the same time enhances it and, as it were, weighs upon it Freedom is perhaps the most revealing, certainly the most general and, also, the most concrete name for the spirit

Freedom we call it, for holier

Name of the soul's there is none,

*To Walt Whitman in America*, I, p 784

('It' refers to 'the spirit of earth' In the following passage, 'it' refers to freedom )

But in weariest of years and obscurest  
Doth it live not at heart of all things,  
The one God and one spirit, a purest  
Life, fed from unstanchable springs?  
Within love, within hatred it is,

*Id*, *id*

Freedom alone is the salt and the spirit that gives  
Life, and without her is nothing that verily lives

*A Child's Future*, II, p 707

Cf *To Walt Whitman in America*, I, p 785, *Tenebrae*, I, p 752,  
*Thalassius*, I, p 593

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Freedom is one thing with its sensuous realization—that is,  
with the 'sound' of the song

and freedom's the sense of thy spirit, the sound  
of thy song,

*March, an Ode*, I, p 468

('Thy' refers to the 'maddest and gladdest of months') The unity  
of sense and spirit is explicitly declared

Spirit and sense are as one  
In the light not of star nor of sun,  
Liberty there is the light

*Tenebrae*, I, p 752

'Sense' (as I understand) is actualization, 'spirit' the *intrinsic* or  
*eternal* in it, 'liberty' the purest and newest, most creative  
moment, which is both actualization (individuality, form) and  
the overcoming of multiplicity. A kind of trinity is represented,  
in which freedom is the central, most dynamic and most revealing  
moment.

Freedom constitutes the decisive element which makes for  
time's reality (see below, § 36). Cf. the following line:

And freedom fills time's veins with power,

*On the Downs*, I, p 855

Freedom is felt as at once original—not absolutely necessitated  
—and infinite. The second aspect is especially signified in the  
following passage:

Free as the wind when the heart of the twilight is  
stirred

Eastward, and sounds from the springs of the sunrise  
are heard

Free—and we know not another as infinite world

*A Child's Future*, II, p 707

This infinity depends on a feeling of virtuality, and this is intensely stimulated by form. A deeper infinity, again, as I have many times pointed out, is in some degree implied.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Song for the Centenary of Walter Savage Landor*, 45, II, p 447, *A Child's Future*, II, p 708, *Before a Crucifix*, I 88, I, p 744, *The Armada*, VII, I, p 505

36 *Time* Time has been considered as a mere negative condition—a delay, as it were, in the fulfilment of God's perfection, incompatible with God's omnipotence, an emblem of transitoriness and decay, a mere external relation. In recent years, however, time's reality has been brought into prominence (Relativity or, rather, some misinterpretations of it, should not deceive us.) Swinburne deeply sees time's *substantial* character

Time, father of life, and more great than the life it  
begat and began,  
Earth's keeper and heaven's and their fate, lives,  
thinks, and hath substance in man

The minutes that beat with his heart are the words to  
which worlds keep chime,  
And the thought in his pulses is part of the blood and  
the spirit of time

*Hymn of Man*, I, p. 761

Cf §§ 35, 38

The forward urge, which intelligibly belongs to the very intrinsic nature of the mental synthesis (cf Chapter VII, § 3), is itself a light and a colour, and a force, in Swinburne's poetical imagination. Cf. in this connection the last words of the following passage

Through the darkness and the splendour of the centuries,  
loud or dumb,  
Shines and wanes and shines the spirit, lit with love of  
life to come

*The Altar of Righteousness*, II, p. 1141

Cf *Hymn to Proserpine*, l. 54, I, p. 70

The hardly perceptible lapse of time seems to reflect the sense of an intimate becoming and the perpetuity of the prime sources

I hear the low sound of the spring of time

*Tiresias*, I, p. 837

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

37 Temporal multiplicity (not time) effaced, or overshadowed,  
evokes and expresses a sense of eternity

And all these things, bright as they shone before  
Man first set foot on earth or sail from shore,  
Rose not less radiant than the sun sees now  
When the autumn sea was cloven of Tristram's  
prow

*Tristram of Lyonesse, VIII, II, p 121*

(‘Them’, in the following passage, refers to the English ships  
which are sailing to meet and fight the ‘Armada’ )

And about them the blithe sea smiles  
And flashes to windward and lee  
Round capes and headlands and isles  
That heed not if war there be,  
Round Sark, round Wight, green jewels of light in  
the ring of the golden sea

*The Armada, V, I, p 496*

38 *Fate* Fate is a power, an obscure purpose, non-human (cf  
§ 24) It is not deterministically conceived Swinburne's inter-  
pretation of fate agrees with that which has generally prevailed  
among civilized and uncivilized nations—for it is only in our  
time that an attempt has been made to interpret the idea of fate  
as the naive expression or recognition of what is described in  
modern times as the uniformity and rigidity of natural laws<sup>1</sup>  
Hence there is no contradiction between Swinburne's concep-  
tion of fate and, on the other hand, his conception of freedom  
In fact the existence of a hidden power which influences our  
actions may have a decisive importance from a practical point of  
view, but, once an active principle in living processes, implying  
original causality and freedom, is admitted, it matters little, from  
an ontological point of view, *where* freedom chiefly resides,  
either in our consciousness, or in our subconsciousness, or in ex-  
ternal agencies The existence of tyrants has never interfered  
with the ontological problem of freedom

<sup>1</sup> Cf my work *Studi sulle precognizioni*, 1937, p 142

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Fate, in Swinburne's poems—leaving aside its meaning as the embodiment of a lofty thought of universality and self-transcendence—is characterized above all by *power*

Fate, that breathes power upon the lips of time,

*Tristram of Lyonesse*, IX, II, p 133

In this respect, that is to say, in *making* time's reality, it is most like freedom (cf *On the Downs*, I, p 855, quoted § 35), and most like love (cf *Tristram of Lyonesse*, *Prelude*, II, p 5) Indeed it is conceived as essentially akin to them But, perhaps because of its stronger and vaster, obscure purposeful character, or because we know hardly anything else about it, it is pre-eminently described as power It gives to the numberless processes and events a wider unity and a temporal direction (Cf *Id*, VI, II 209, 210, II, p 94, *The Eve of Revolution*, 27, l 1, I, p 685)

Also it forms, let us say, in the Macrocerbrum, a world of subtle qualitative relations

A raiment of eternal change inwrought

With shapes and hues more subtly spun than thought,

*Tristram of Lyonesse*, IX, II, p 133

39 The idea that life's principle—that is to say, *subjectivity*—cannot be destroyed and will always exist, though it may have had a beginning, is suggested ('They' refers to 'forces without form and viewless powers')

But life they lay no hand on, life once given

No force of theirs hath competence to take,

Life that was given for some divine thing's sake,

To mix the bitterness of earth with heaven,

Light with man's night, and music with his breath,

Dies not, but makes its living food of death

*Tiresias*, I, p 838

Compare, however

Our mother Nature, dark and sweet as sleep,

And strange as life and strong as death, holds fast,

Even as she holds our hearts alive, the deep

Dumb secret of her first-born births and last

*In Memory of John William Inchbold*, I, p 550.



ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

'The law of tears'—a deeper consciousness—began, no prodigies announcing her

But sudden, an unfathered flame,  
And broken out of night, she shone,  
She, without body, without name,  
In days forgotten and foregone,

*Atalanta in Calydon*, II, p 312

40 *Evil* Swinburne represents evil as real in itself, seeking itself *qua* evil, original and ultimate, as a Deity is conceived to be Compare the passage

For who shall change with prayers or thanksgivings  
The mystery of the cruelty of things?  
Or say what God above all gods and years  
With lamentation from strange lands,  
                    from scarred mouths of slaves,  
From prison, and from plunging prows of ships  
When darkness is made fast with seals and bars,  
And fierce reluctance of disastrous stairs,  
                    and blind inexpiable things—  
With sorrow of labouring moons,  
And weeping of the weary Pleiads seven,  
Feeds the mute melancholy lust of heaven?

*Anactoria*, I, p 62

                    who bade  
Pain animate the dust of dead desire,  
And life yield up her flower to violent fate?

*Id*, I, pp 62, 63

The whole tragedy of life is epitomized in the last line, where the contrast between the delicate, infinitely laborious works of nature and their miserable end is represented 'Pain' describes, crudely and directly, the primordial dissatisfaction—and this seems to be alluded to as if it were both the mother and the daughter of 'desire' Yet the poet's general view is not that of pessimism

Faith in the spirit, immanently conceived, is, in this main connection, Swinburne's dominant idea Joy and courage character-

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

ize freedom, which is life's supreme and intelligible reality  
Sometimes, however, he represents man as the blind instrument  
of a cruel destiny

In his heart is a blind desire,  
In his eyes foreknowledge of death,  
*Atalanta in Calydon*, II, p 259

41 *Truth* Eternal verities may have been distorted and discredited, for everything in mental life is falsified, when it is not seen in the light of the ever-new spring of the spirit and is *objectified*. But they cannot be cancelled, they depend on an intrinsic characterization of self-activity, that is to say, of subjectivity itself 'Truth', as the word is used in the following passage, is a name, again, for the spirit. It lays stress on the intrinsic necessity of the manifold aspects of the creative essence, and on the 'unconquerable' character of its ever-renewing form and inner relations (cf 'body'). It points to a value of eternity which the mere *agreement* of our mental presentments—that has been sometimes considered as the ultimate test of truth—could never afford, and which depends on something deeply intrinsic in the nature of the synthesis of thought.

a star  
all unconquerable by noon or night,  
Being kindled only of life's own inmost fire,  
Truth,  
Fountain of all things living,  
brighter than the sun's the body of Truth  
Eternal,

*Tristram of Lyonesse*, IX, II, p 135

Swinburne, in the words which immediately follow, depicts this 'body of Truth eternal' as almost unattainable by our knowledge, exceeding our imagination yet this statement should not be taken literally. In fact, according to his conviction, this truth informs all growth. It is one and the same in life and in thought—even in theoretical thought, in so far as the 'sap' of life or spirit does not desert it. Compare the following extracts

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

For truth only is living,  
Truth only is whole,

*Hertha*, I, p 739

('His' refers to 'man')

the truth and his spirit are wed,  
His soul is at one with the reason of things that is sap to  
the roots

*Hymn of Man*, I, p 762

The very principle of truth is asserted, though only implicitly, and abstractly, in the words, 'Reason and love, whose names are one' (*The Eve of Revolution*, I, p 671) For very truth—the principle of truth—lies in the claim for an infinite identity with the real, infinitely, though never absolutely, impersonal, and this is found both in 'reason' and 'love' This truth, which includes objective truth, but does not lie properly in it, and lives in doubt and not in dogma, is not satisfied with any thought whatever which either refuses to face facts or is disinclined to search into the core of reality The following line expresses this deepest claim, and is highly representative of Swinburne's poetry—and life

Truth more than dreams is dear

*A Birth-Song*, I, p 376

Joyful and playful fancy is hardly found in Swinburne's poems  
Even in lines like these,

I found in dreams a place of wind and flowers,  
Full of sweet trees and colour of glad grass,

*A Ballad of Life*, I, p 1

the existential judgement is, let us say, incumbent

Some remarks on the subject of imagination might here find their place I do not mean, in the above or in any connection whatever, to oppose fancy to imagination It is impossible to strip the word 'fancy' of its fundamental, central meaning, which is still that of 'imagination', and, in my opinion, it is preferable to use this word—as does Keats in his poem 'Fancy'—without distinguishing it radically from 'imagination' Quite a different

thing is illusion,<sup>1</sup> and self-delusion, and a forced division from reality, as it is found sometimes in romantic poetry. A radically distinct principle is then prevailing, an external, voluntary and pre-eminently practical attitude, which violates truth. But imagination (I mean fancy as well) does not ignore reality, and particularly, it does not disown or reject objective truth. Imagination supersedes it, or unwittingly obliterates it, only because of the strength of its inward truth. But the claim for truth's wide embrace is contained in it, makes its clearness, its actual infinity, its harmony and its very force. Bereft of truth—of inward truth, and of the very principle of truth, which is again an 'inward' or 'intrinsic' truth—imagination is no more, but arbitrariness, deformity and futile things take its place.

The study of 'substantial' (not 'formal') logic confirms ever and ever again the above statement. Substantial logic, as I maintain, comprehends and constitutes *poetical* thought.\* Intuition is not an evasion from logic but a deeper logic. Imagination is not something, let us say, opaque. And the bright kinships of concepts of which I have given many examples in the passages quoted—for instance, in this chapter, §§ 18, 9 ff, 32—have a force and significance which depend on their deep logical ground.

Neither is imagination a process of abstraction and elimination. This, again, belongs to the external will. Or, if a spontaneous, original process is intended, these words 'abstraction', 'elimination' do not describe it at all.

Imagination interprets reality through intrinsically characterized values and modes, and conditional relations, even as mathematical thought—which is still imagination—ever-originally does. Imagination is *expression*—except that this word 'imagination' avoids the misleading implication of a necessarily external expression. It is actualization, in the sphere of mental presentments. It is very thought: it may differ from scientific thought only through gradual and in the main secondary points of difference (cf. Chapter XVIII, §§ 1, 2).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chapter I, § 34.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chapter VIII, § 24 (2), *Il concetto dell'indeterminazione*, Part II, Chapter III.

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Imagination is that 'body of Truth eternal' of which Swinburne speaks. Blake, among poets and philosophers, is the one who expresses this conception unmixedly.<sup>1</sup> He identifies imagination with Form—the *formative* or *active* principle. Wordsworth has words which strongly and explicitly point to this conception itself,<sup>2</sup> but sometimes, both in his poems and in his prose, he seems to have lost sight of it.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chapter V, § 1.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter VI, § 2 (passage quoted from *The Prelude*, XIV, l. 189). Cf. also Meredith, *A Faith on Trial* (see above, Chapter XIV, § 7).

## Chapter XVI

### OSCAR WILDE

1856-1900

POEMS BY OSCAR WILDE *Methuen, London, 1916* (First Edition 1908 )

1 Oscar Wilde, however untrammelled in his scepticism, still believed that *expression* was not a reality to be entirely derived from something else, but that it revealed a peculiar power of great significance, not unrelated with the formative or active principle of the ancient philosophical tradition. He had not yet attained that signal standpoint, according to which the peculiar value of expression must be traced to such processes as are described, e g , by the phrases 'ridding the system of inhibitions', 'to work out surplus energy'. He still dared to speak of 'the God that is within us' (*Humanitad*, p 204, cf *The Duchess of Padua*, Act II 'the unhewn stone before the sculptor Has set the God within it')<sup>1</sup>

His conception of an active principle is that of absolute immanentism. Compare, for instance

One fiery-coloured moment one great love, and lo! we die  
*Panthea*, p 167

Cf also *Id*, pp 163, 168, *Charmides*, p 132

His consciousness of thought's reality, and of its primacy in respect of its conditions, is unacquired and rich. His scattered reflections on art owe to this their sometimes striking truth

<sup>1</sup> *Methuen, London 1931* (1908), p 60

## OSCAR WILDE

2 The training of the controlling will and the pursuit of the conditions of happiness are 'given away', while passions, and that which is in fact the realization and the discovery of the creative essence—or spirit—through passions, and through the dissolution of personality, are preferred. This idea is certainly found in poets of all ages, but in the case of Oscar Wilde its expression presents a special interest, because he paid most dearly for his choice, or vocation. The following lines appear to belong to his earliest poems collected, and contain an anticipation, as it were, of his whole life.

To drift with every passion till my soul  
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play,  
Is it for this that I have given away  
Mine ancient wisdom, and austere control?

*Hélas!*, p. 3

3 The idea of making life a sort of *experience*, to be pursued for its own sake, the insistence upon this idea, indicates a markedly cognitive attitude. Now life at its deepest and fullest may be known either in life generally or in art, since their principle is one. In art we may more intimately and revealingly attain some aspects of the original, self-dependent principle. But in the main it is in life that we may get the fullest experience. Thus he chooses life, he says, leaving aside a more ambitious, perhaps less genuine and less disinterested apprehension of the same essence. Cf. the passages

had I not been made of common clay  
I had climbed the higher heights unclimbed yet, seen  
the fuller air, the larger day  
From the wildness of my wasted passion I had struck  
a better, clearer song,  
Lit some lighter light of freer freedom  
And the mighty nations would have crowned me, who  
am crownless now and without name,

*Flower of Love*, p. 211

OSCAR WILDE

I have made my choice, have lived my poems, and,  
though youth is gone in wasted days,  
I have found the lover's crown of myrtle better than  
the poet's crown of bays

*Id*, p 213

The intimate freedom of contemplation and inspiration, and, on the other hand, freedom in general, are rightly and subtly described, in the first of the passages quoted, as differing only by degrees

4 Beauty, no matter if in art or outside it, shows original grace as free from anything left extrinsic, for instance, from utilitarian ends Oscar Wilde finds that 'the spirit of beauty' has deserted his age 'Somehow the grace, the bloom of things has flown ' (*Humanitas*, p 206), and he was among those who hoped to find at last in art's and beauty's present glory the justification of life itself, and thereby to atone for 'the soul's dread weariness' (*Queen Henrietta Maria*, p 158) and for much evil To the new Helen he says

Thou hast come down our darkness to illumine  
For we, close-caught in the wide nets of Fate,  
Wearied with waiting for the World's Desire,  
Aimlessly wandered in the House of gloom,  
Till we beheld thy re-arisen shrine,  
And the white glory of thy loveliness

*The New Helen*, p 59

5 Concerning quite a different matter than that of his aesthetic creed—but not entirely unrelated to it and to the point of view, prevalently individualistic, that there is in our consciousness an original and supremely real element—Oscar Wilde is deeply affected by a problem, which is most serious and acutest in ethics and politics The social will is entirely—and murderously—incompetent, in the face of intimate and original values and realities He says



OSCAR WILDE

But this I know, that every Law  
That men have made for Man,  
Since first Man took his brother's life,  
And the sad world began,  
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff  
With a most evil fan

*The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, p 298

In our present effort to increase organization and to elaborate the means for the attainment of a less illusory justice, this we must never forget!

The man who is to be hanged is represented with penetrating and loving words

His soul was resolute, and held  
No hiding-place for fear,  
He often said that he was glad  
The hangman's hands were near

*Id*, p 283

And his step seemed light and gay,  
But I never saw a man who looked  
So wistfully at the day

*Id*, p 273

The less apparent thought of this man is immense and weighty as life, as destiny is

6 Women are gently depicted—with words which owe their lightness and their wide embrace chiefly to the fact that they are born of, and embody, spiritually radical concepts

She hardly knew  
She was a woman, so  
Sweetly she grew

*Requiescat*, p 39

There is lightly suggested self-surrender, self-oblivion, the transcending of all exclusivity—a transcendency which is inherent in

## OSCAR WILDE

being itself, the soul concerned with (original) value, whatever it is, and not with objective particularity (which emphasizes the distinction between male and female), the problem, or indeed the mystery, of *value* which is, by definition, consciousness, and yet seems to be less conscious the higher it is (cf Chapter XVII, § 1)

Compare also

Yet the wife loves him<sup>1</sup> and will rise next day  
With some red bruise across a careworn face,  
And sweep the house, and do the common service,  
And try and smile, and only be too glad  
If he does not beat her a second time  
Before her child<sup>1</sup>—that is how women love  
*The Duchess of Padua*, p 104

I see when men love women  
They give them but a little of their lives,  
But women when they love give everything,  
*Id*, p 105

7 Form exclusive, self-centred—in love's inner play—is signified by the image of the 'Sphinx' It is shown as an eternal power, both dismally obscure and most vital

In a dim corner of my room for longer than my fancy  
thinks  
A beautiful and silent Sphinx has watched me through  
the shifting gloom

Inviolate and immobile she does not rise she does not  
stir.  
For silver moons are naught to her and naught to her  
the suns that reel

Get hence, you loathsome mystery<sup>1</sup> Hideous animal,  
get hence<sup>1</sup>

*The Sphinx*, pp 247, 267.

## OSCAR WILDE

At the same time the poem obviously represents a lower sensuous life—an inferior level of life altogether—felt and feared

8 Images of landscape are not rare in Oscar Wilde's undeniably scanty poetical production. Here, again, it would be easy to call attention to radical concept-values, which are expressed in the landscape—or, if we prefer, are the *medium* for the representation of the landscapes themselves. Compare, e.g., *The Garden of Eros*, l. 103, p. 28, *The Burden of Itys*, ll. 90, 91, p. 67, *Charmides*, p. 129, l. 6, *La Fuite de la Lune*, ll. 1-4, p. 136.

## Chapter XVII

### FRANCIS THOMPSON

1859-1907

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THE POEMS OF FRANCIS THOMPSON *Oxford University Press*,  
1938 (First Impression, 1937)

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1 We find in the following passage unmistakably the genuine and rare poet and, at one and the same time, the explicit expression of that *core of causality*, which is the main subject of the present study

In poets floating like a water-flower  
Upon the bosom of the glassy hour,  
In skies that no man sees to move,  
Lurk untumultuous vortices of power,  
For joy too native, and for agitation  
Too instant, too entire for sense thereof,  
*Contemplation*, p. 189

'In skies that no man sees to move, Lurk' the moment of indeterminacy is here depicted in all its power, as a positive and original reality

'For joy too native' perhaps the active principle is known or felt as too familiar, ancient, connatural to everything, for 'joy' to be the proper emotion in this connection. Or also we may find somehow reflected, in these very words, the idea that the causal and present essence lies deeper than joy, and sorrow, and personality (cf. Chapter XV, § 25)

'Too entire for sense thereof' The problem faces us again

## FRANCIS THOMPSON

How is it possible that there should be almost an opposition between consciousness (or sense) of value, which is essential to value, and, on the other hand, value itself?<sup>1</sup>

'Untumultuous', 'for agitation too instant' Every extrinsic action is absent. Yet the absence of all external causality, of any in itself lifeless object of the will, and of all means (which is not a medium of expression and real expression) could not in itself account for the tremendous power revealed. The absence of anything extrinsic is only an aspect and, in a sense, a consequence, of an ardent originality—of the very intensity of self-activity in poetical and contemplative thought. The 'untumultuous', 'instant' moment contains, in its apparent peacefulness, in its very lightness, an unquenchable thirst, and a key-note deep and rich, in which all the turmoil of external life is foreshadowed. Compare Keats's expressions 'wakeful rest', 'ardent listlessness' (Chapter IX, § 2) and 'Oh what a power hath white Simplicity!' (Id., § 4).

Only when all extrinsic processes are superseded we have activity and reality in a higher sense.<sup>2</sup> The concept of intrinsic purposiveness and causality has been admirably expressed by poets, as we have seen, and this is one of the clearest examples. The genuine cognitive experience of the poet reveals whatever may be intelligible and less fictitious, as far as I can see, in the traditional conception according to which God is represented as moveless and changeless, yet active.

The philosophical pregnancy of these lines and, on the other hand, their poetical value not only point to one and the same source, but could hardly be distinguished. This reflects a general fact, as I maintain, but the lines quoted show it most clearly and impressively, and are in this respect especially significant, both from the point of view of philosophy—as the science of an original qualitative principle—and from that of art.

Compare for some passages, which explicitly refer to the same concept—values, *Contemplation*, pp. 188–190.

Indeterminate immanent purpose, again, and the fact that the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chapters VIII, § 3, XVI, § 6, I, § 37.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chapter I, § 33 (first paragraph), *Index*, 'Subject-object-means distinction'. See *Intelligence in Expression*, §§ 82, 83.

## FRANCIS THOMPSON

liveliest creative moment approaches formlessness (cf 'death'), find in the following lines their direct expression

A bubble, charioteered by the inward breath  
Which, ardent for its own invisible hue,  
Urges me glittering to aerial death,  
I am rapt towards that bodiless paramour,  
*Sister Songs*, Part II, p 36

2 Generally Francis Thompson envisages the alternation of life and death—a constant thought in his poetry—from an external point of view (cf e.g., 'The fern-plants moulder when the ferns arise For there is nothing lives but something dies, And there is nothing dies but something lives' *Ode to the Setting Sun*, p 103) But the intimate meaning of the death and life relation (cf Chapter XV, § 10) is undoubtedly reflected in the following extracts

It is the falling star that trails the light,  
It is the breaking wave that hath the might  
Is it not so, O thou down-stricken Day,  
That draw'st thy splendours round thee in thy fall?  
Thou dost thy dying so triumphally  
Clad in the light of thine immortal youth!  
*Ode to the Setting Sun*, pp 96, 97

Since the hunt o' the world begun,  
Lashed with terror, leashed with longing,  
The mighty course is ever run

With love that trembleth, fear that loveth,  
And Life with Death  
In obscure nuptials moveth,

*Orient Ode*, p 198

It must be noticed, however, that what is above emphasized in Francis Thompson's poetry, in this connection, is the idea that death bears in itself the germ of life, in so far as this idea reflects

FRANCIS THOMPSON

practical and ethical aspirations (Cf *Ode to the Setting Sun*, p 103,  
ll 13-16, 22-25 )

3 The pictorial (or sonorous) images, seen (or heard) between the images themselves—alluded to in the following lines—do not describe something which we may simply refer to memory, or retention, or the intermingling of physiological data

Hidden stars by the shown stars' sheen,  
Colours unseen by the colours seen,  
And sounds unheard heard sounds between,  
And a night is in the light of the sun  
*New Year's Chimes*, p 203

The last line contains the clue—if it were needed—to those preceding Infinity, or the highly indeterminate moment (cf 'Night') lies in the single star, or colour, or sound (*qua* sensed), in the same way as 'a night is in the light of the sun' Infinity is inseparable from instant actualization, inasmuch as this is felt as not entirely predetermined and contains an element of potency The refrain, in the same poem, repeated with little variation (e g, 'And a million suns are but as one') confirms this interpretation The quality of being infinite—and virtually universal—is immediately contained in the single actualization

This actual, felt infinity finds higher and richer forms Compare the following lines with those just quoted

For ever the songs I sing are sad with the songs I  
never sing,  
*Memorat Memoria*, p 343

How many songs must die that this may live!  
*From the Night of Forebeing*, p 212

Cf *Daisy*, ll 47-48, p 4

4 'Invisible' and the analogous terms in the following passage refer, in the first place, to the essential moment in psychic activity, which refuses to be objectively identified

## FRANCIS THOMPSON

O world invisible, we view thee,  
O world intangible, we touch thee,  
O world unknowable, we know thee,  
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

*The Kingdom of God*, p. 349

Francis Thompson's poetry even seems to have its nuclear force in the discovery of the immanent spirit (cf §§ 1, 6 and 9). But here we may find the expression, however dim, of the feeling that the infinite exists also outside form and outside all our conceptions.

5 The infinite presence, or the infinite absence, lurking in all things seen, acquires a new meaning and a new power in the following lines. They express the idea of an inward purpose, never satisfied—and not transcendently conceived, or not necessarily so.

O gain that lurk'st ungain'd in all gain!  
O love we just fall short of in all love!  
O height that in all heights art still above!  
O beauty that dost leave all beauty pain!

*Desiderium Indesideratum*, p. 320

Compare also

Why have we longings of immortal pain,  
And all we long for mortal?

*Ode to the Setting Sun*, p. 102

Here undoubtedly a transcendent interpretation of this very feeling is suggested. The poet is inclined to think that these 'longings of immortal pain' are a link with a spiritual reality profoundly different from ours.

6 The following lines from the poem 'The Hound of Heaven' concern, again, the deep-rooted dissatisfaction which the two passages above quoted searchingly express.

But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart  
*The Hound of Heaven*, p. 91



## FRANCIS THOMPSON

Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth,  
Never did any milk of hers once bless  
My thirsting mouth

*Id*, p 92

The extract last quoted certainly points to an ascetic view. But generally, as I suggested, the poet's attitude is neither ascetic nor transcendentalist. He gazes into the depth of a reality which, as he conceives it, is present and intimate, *living*, and intelligible. His religious belief allows for the personification of the 'tremendous lover'—in the poem 'The Hound of Heaven'—and undoubtedly has a great part in the sustained unity of the song, but there is nothing in its concepts and words which may not be understood as the expression of the intrinsic or *eternal* nature of love. He does not pre-eminently see in the infinite the permanent, the stable. He does not especially extol a reality outside time. He does not emphasize the infinite as the unintelligible, the unknowable. Again, he searches into it without tracing it necessarily either to a transcendent Deity or to a relatively transcendent influence (cf above, §§ 1-3)

7 The subtle reality, to which the first quoted passages in this Chapter refer, is represented as the supreme value in our earthly experience. This is implied in the following extract

(*The Poet addresses his Maker*)

The life I textured, Thou the song —my handicraft  
is not divine<sup>1</sup>

*A Judgement in Heaven*, p 148<sup>1</sup>

Cf also, as regards poetry's deep spontaneity, the following lines ('He' refers to the poet)

Where he sows he doth not reap,  
He reapeth where he did not sow,  
Vision will mate him not by law and vow  
She waits him, unsuspected and unknown

*Sister Songs*, p 45

<sup>1</sup> *Italics in the text*

## FRANCIS THOMPSON

8 In fact this subtle power is not the concern of a parcel-truth, for modern pseudo-scientists to define it reflects the difference between that which is *active*, intimately formative, intrinsically characterized, spiritually real, and that which is not. And it involves the man's whole personality. In this respect, the following autobiographical fragments may be of special interest.

And ah! so long myself had strayed afar  
From child, and woman, and the boon earth's green,  
And all wherewith life's face is fair beseen,  
*Sister Songs*, p. 30

I who can scarcely speak my fellows' speech,  
*Id.*, p. 33

I know not equipoise, only purgatorial joys,  
Grief's singing to the soul's instrument,  
And forgetfulness which yet knoweth that it doth  
forget,  
*The Sere of the Leaf*, p. 154

9 The following images depict the *actual cause* more directly

An unviolated soul of pleasure,  
*To the English Martyrs*, p. 284

Here pleasure is *active*, cf. on this subject Chapters V, § 3, XV, § 30, and *Index*

Not of these things  
My weak endeavouring tongue,  
But of those simpler things  
Less heavenful the unstrained integrity  
Moving most natively,  
*Of Nature Laud and Plaint*, p. 309

Spontaneity is here described as 'unstrained integrity'. Spiritual integrity, the concept of which we have often met, is in this way directly mentioned. Indeed we find the idea of it—and of the

FRANCIS THOMPSON

'wondrous simple'—repeatedly expressed, cf *Id.*, l 43, *The Mistress of Vision*, p 187 See Chapter XV, § 32

Spirit and flesh are not sundered, the material element, in which—as Meredith says—love 'gains vitality', is not set aside Compare the passage

Ah me! my very flesh turns soul,  
Essenced,

*After her Going*, p 86

Out of this abject earth of me  
I was translated and enskied  
Into the heavenly-regioned She  
Now of that vision I bereaven  
This knowledge keep, that may not dim —  
Short aim needs man to reach to Heaven,  
So ready is Heaven to stoop to him,

*Gate of the Way*, pp 234, 235.

That falling kiss  
Touching long-laid expectance, all went up  
Suddenly into passion, yea, the night  
Caught, blazed, and wrapt us round in vibrant fire

*Love Declared*, p 246

The vital, essential character of novelty (creative novelty) is emphasized Compare *Carmen Genesis*, II, l 21, p 228, *To the Sinking Sun*, ll 13-24, p 327 The idea also, that the very principle of free-will is contained in the nature of spontaneity, or at least of poetical spontaneity (cf Chapter XV, § 35), is—implicitly—asserted

Poet! still, still thou dost rehearse,  
In the great *fiat* of thy Verse,  
Creation's primal plot,

*Carmen Genesis*, p 227<sup>1</sup>

No doubt this conviction is born of the poet's most profound experience, in poetry and more generally in art we draw near the

<sup>1</sup> *Italics in the text*

## FRANCIS THOMPSON

internal abyss of real productivity, which, in its ultimate nature, admits no past, no (external) cause

Innocence, also, may be envisaged as an aspect of original causality. It expresses something which is felt as primal—or, at any rate, as primordial and of cosmic significance—that is found in life's deep spontaneity. It may convey the idea of *simplicity*, or it may reflect the moment of utter *formlessness*, which is contained in all intense renewal. It may especially depend on and signify the obliteration of the separate self, of its objectifying and most clever will, and thereby the disclosing of that very spontaneity and grace. Francis Thompson particularly loves, and depicts, this 'primal innocence'.

Thou art enshrined  
In a too primal innocence for this eye  
*Sister Songs*, p. 48

The hills look over on the South,  
And southward dreams the sea,  
And with the sea-breeze hand in hand  
Came innocence and she  
*Daisy*, p. 3

## Chapter XVIII

### SOME CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

1 The theory of an active principle, implying indeterminacy and characterizing psychic activity, finds a fundamental development in the theory of art. It not only strengthens the consciousness of the poet and of the critic as to the ultimate foundation of the concepts which are most active in poetry—and in art in general.<sup>1</sup> It is also concerned with the 'limitation of the spheres'—if I may borrow an expression from an Essay by Katharine E. Gilbert<sup>2</sup>—with which philosophers are particularly concerned, that is to say, with the distinctive features, the specific characters of art, as compared with other branches of human activity.

Yet, before entering into this subject, I must point out a mistake which has proved fatal, in my judgment, all through the history of aesthetics. Art theories generally fail, because they neglect or refuse to consider that the distinctive elements of art—which may be necessary to define art and to distinguish it from any other branch of activity—are one thing, while its fundamental elements are another. The latter can also be factors which are not at all exclusively proper to art, though the value of a given work of art may rest chiefly and essentially upon them. What differentiates a thing is not necessarily that which most profoundly describes it.

I shall make this argument clearer, firstly by recalling some aspects of art which I would call 'fundamental'—and not 'distinctive', that is to say, not proper to art exclusively.

<sup>1</sup> It may strengthen or confirm such consciousness, but, in a more or less implicit form, this can hardly be entirely lacking. Cf. also, with reference to art in general, *Il concetto dell'indeterminazione*, Part II, Chapters I to V.

<sup>2</sup> *The Relation between Aesthetics and Art-Criticism*, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 26th May 1938.

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

(1) Immanence of value is art's fundamental and most essential characteristic. It means that each moment is not subordinated to something else and is not impoverished as a sheer means to an end. Also, in its highest intenseness, it means that the very present moment radically answers and in a sense annuls the being's deepest claim for eternity. But this immanent character is found also and essentially in heroism, and in the behaviour of the man who lives, as it is said, in the grace of God.

(2) The feeling of the intrinsic or eternal character of thought's and life's inward values and modes, as prevailing over the historical transitory interest and the particular ends and objects, belongs to the essence of art, yet may be found also in the contemplation of a landscape, and in pure mathematics.

(3) The plastic power, that is to say, the immediate invention—be it creation or adaptation—of the material conditions, may be found also in mimicry, in inferior phantasies of dreams, in hysteria, in mediumistic powers, and (I suppose) in organic processes.

(4) That which makes great the soul of a man who does not look for small triumphs, and who easily forgets his own particular self, impresses, or rather constitutes, the inmost rhythm of a work of art, nor can a work of art exist without it, but it is not exclusively proper to art.

(5) The discovery of the spirit—as that nucleus of kindred values which we have considered—is, if not the object, the spring of art. Yet it is discovered and embodied also in ethical and, in some measure, in practical and in abstractly cognitive life.

(6) And the direct character of this discovery—a self-discovery, a self-realization—is also, under certain restrictions, a general character of mental activity.

(7) There is a sense in which it is right to maintain that reality lies in art pre-eminently. This is the sense in which *that* is supremely real, which, firstly, has in itself its *cause*<sup>1</sup> and, secondly, as creative thought does, knows self-causality (intimate, original causality) at once as a value of certainty and as a value of universality.<sup>2</sup> But it would be vain, again, and absolutely false, to seek

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chapter XV, § 33

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chapters II, § 1 (1) and IX, § 16 (3). See *Index*, 'Reality'

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

even in this characteristic power of art anything belonging to it exclusively

On the other hand the distinctive element, which sets a boundary between art and other forms of activity, does not coincide with the innermost soul of art, nor does it contain art's definition. It ought really to be conceived as, and reduced to, a mere element of fact, the fact of a concurrence of conditions—among them the factors mentioned above—which is contingent and comparatively secondary. In order that there be a work of art, the original value of inner being, directly active and fully immanent, must realize itself in the world of mental presentments. Moreover, it must express itself in mental presentments of a certain kind, and, though there may be intelligible reasons for this, it is only historically that we know in which mental presentments and in which sensuous material artistic activity may develop, eliciting a full spiritual integrity and depth and deserving unconditionally the name of art. In fact, we could well suppose an organic constitution, different from ours, in which smell (not less than sound) would be the vehicle of art, and express spiritual lightness and simplicity, and self-surrender, for instance, or a feeling of dissatisfaction and of aching responsibility, and reveal and embody the actual, ever-initial, luminous cause of consciousness in all its inherent richness.

2 Among the characteristic and *distinctive* feature of art there is, however, one which deserves a privileged place. The liveliness of the sensuous material—its being originally active, a multitudinous source of man's very intelligence and life—is essential and, in a high degree, peculiar to art.<sup>1</sup>

But we cannot understand the importance of this factor, nor its full meaning, nor the possibility of its very existence, except through the conception I have tried to develop, namely, the conception of a positivity implying indeterminacy, coextensive with subjectivity, and containing—in embryo, a *parte subjecti*—the whole gamut of our psyche. We cannot, except through this

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my work *Intelligence in Expression*, 1925, Chapters I and II. See, for a quite independent elaboration of a similar point of view, A. Baratono, *Il mondo sensibile*, 1934, Chapters VI and VII.

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

conception, understand the union between sense and meaning nor the aptness of sense to express the highest values. Nor can we understand why, when we enter the realm of sensibility, we enter the realm of God—a world more sensible, richer, truer, less one-sided, at one and the same time more impersonal and more intimately personal, far more favoured by taste, and by grace, and by wisdom, than the world of voluntary thought, which is that of external construction, and not of intimate growth.

Philosophers have generally undervalued sensation, and (a most lamentable, in my opinion, and almost incredible error) they have put the principle of the synthesis outside it. They have considered sensation as entirely passive, a reality without problems and without mysteries. Poets have not followed the same way.

The fact is that the fundamental problems—and the fundamental realities—of psychic activity are met in sensation no less than in sentiment, no less than in the will, no less than in cognitive activity. I mean, for instance, such problems as the unity, or inner transparency, of the psychic present, the problem of a cause not entirely derived, the reality, or else the illusion, of an actual origin of value (or quality), the degree of reality of mental activity.

3 Quite a different and opposite conception seems indeed to be that which is expounded by the late R. G. Collingwood.<sup>1</sup> Yet his arguments, in my judgment, are not convincing.

We do not see a colour in a painting, in the first moment, or separately, as a thing belonging to sentiency rather than to imagination.<sup>2</sup> I shall not enter, however, into a detailed criticism of Collingwood's statements. I will rather point out a few main errors, as they seem to me, and radical mental attitudes, which are the manifest starting-point of his theoretical constructions.

<sup>1</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, Oxford, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> The implication that the *mere sensation* (supposing it exists at all, or that such words have a meaning) has some prior right of itself and then is 'made out', 'interpreted', and almost put in its right place, by the work of a controlling consciousness, if we keep to the letter of the words, appears often in Collingwood's pages (cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 141, 143, 194, 203-8, 309).



## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

(1) Collingwood, in so far as sensations are concerned, agrees, under certain restrictions, with the methods of behaviourism, which identifies 'the psychical with the physiological' <sup>1</sup> Sensation is relegated, as it were, into the borderland between matter and spirit. Then the problem of the arising of spirit is divided into many problems and solved by supposing many successive additions—the arising of imagination, of attention, of intellection. <sup>2</sup> Thus spirit can be constructed out of a matter-of-course reality, which, at least as far as the spiritual or psychological element is concerned, does not require much explanation.

Perhaps these minor problems seem to be less mysterious, and more easily approachable. In fact, neither is their solution obvious, nor are they in the least explained, moreover, they are not really concerned with the highest and most essential values of consciousness, which they are supposed to lead us to explain. In order to avoid swallowing the big mouthful—spirit—we delude ourselves by swallowing many small mouthfuls, but this is a desperate device.

For it is obviously *not* a recommendable method to try to suppose such subjectivity, from which subjectivity itself is almost blotted out—replaced by mere existents, processes of behaviour, reflexes, fields of force. Is it subjectivity, or not? If it is, it carries with itself an enormous reality, not moulded according to the requirements of an open or disguised mechanistic conception, and this, from its most rudimentary forms, from its very beginning. And we ought to try to elicit, not to overlook, how this very rudiment can arise—unless we are willing to admit that its principle lies already in matter, or, on the other hand, that it has always virtually or actually existed as a principle quite distinct from that of matter. Its reality is too heavy and all-compact, intrinsically rich, highly peculiar, irreplaceable, unpredictable, for us to obtain it through the addition of items bereft of the principle itself, that is to say, of quality, or explained through additions of items, the principle of which remains unexplained.

If subjectivity—or quality—appears at a certain moment in evolution, this fact must be faced, and pointed out in its diffi-

<sup>1</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *op cit*, p. 205

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, *id.*, p. 203 ff.

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

culties and problems and in its magnitude, not minimized, not surreptitiously introduced

The gist of this is—to minimize thought's (or life's) original nature, and to have it home-made out of easily obtainable materials, which hardly may present any problem whatever. Reality is not like that. And in a world where there is, as perhaps in the present time, a tendency to reduce everything to its quantitative and interchangeable aspects, in a world where the mystery and greatness of the quality tends to be lost, this or the like *constructions* of thought's reality replace very aptly, and in accordance with the main trend of the age,<sup>1</sup> the exploration and at one and the same time the intimately cognitive *expression* of the same reality

(2) An extrinsic process, as I think we may describe it, and a controlling consciousness bringing it about, are everywhere considered by the author as paramount. This may be gathered from the following quotations: 'Now feeling as so dominated, *compelled to accept whatever place consciousness gives it*, is no longer impression, it is idea'<sup>2</sup> 'we have become conscious of ourselves as its masters' ('its' of the impressions)<sup>3</sup> 'a feeling which, in addition to becoming conscious of it, *we have placed* in its relation to others'<sup>4</sup> 'In this new capacity, as losing their power over us *and becoming subject to our will*, they (the impressions of the sense) are still feelings, and feelings of the same kind as before, but they have ceased to be mere sensations and have become what we call imagination'<sup>5</sup>

Nothing is more incompatible with art—and with the very nature of thought—than this extrinsic process. The practice of putting a sensum in its right place does not constitute thought. It can be understood but as a comparatively easy work, easily admitting of substitution, a matter of cleverness, in tendency external (*in tendency* for an inward or intuitive element, a glimpse of real intelligence, is never lacking, if we are speaking of thought

<sup>1</sup> To comply with it, however, is certainly *not* the attitude of Collingwood

<sup>2</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *op cit*, p. 207. The *italics* are mine—in this and in the following quotations

<sup>3</sup> *Id., id.*, p. 210

<sup>4</sup> *Id., id.*, p. 213

<sup>5</sup> *Id., id.*, p. 223

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

at all) Qualities developing on qualities, when self-discovering values are multiplied and kinships in the depth of the original cause are disclosed, this makes the irreplaceable texture of thought

In fact, what is spoken of by the author is not spirit, nor consciousness, nor art, nor thought, but the will, in the narrower sense—a principle of hard transcendency over *actual* presentments, which tends to suppress, to sterilize, to atrophy feeling and thought itself. The controlling consciousness has indeed an important function in art, and in thought generally, but it must remain secondary and keep a certain modesty. It may be of great consequence both in the preparation and in the actual execution of the work of art, but it does not make its reality. The work of art possesses a self-sustaining reality, which is without comparison vaster and stronger, of a far greater spiritual breadth, than that of the planning will.

In a larger sense, obviously, the will can be identified with the principle of life itself, or with active love, for instance, or with a live feeling of responsibility, or with any self-active value whatever. But, in a more specific sense, it is a principle by which the immediate present moment, either in its ephemeral or in its eternal value, is denied, it is a principle superseding, or paralysing sensibility and value, and it is not, I think, the highest or the paramount form of consciousness. For at the end what conquers a feeling is not, exactly, our control over it, but a higher feeling, for instance, a feeling of responsibility, an original value, which—though generally overlooked or unnoticed—is the real strength and content of our controlling will. Let us also state again that the controlling consciousness and that which is generally called ‘free-will’ are only particular forms of freedom, though most significant, but freedom lies essentially in *value* (cf. Chapter XV, § 35).

I do not meet in psychic reality the different levels of controlling activity which are spoken of, nor do I find in such controlling activities, or in ‘decision’,<sup>1</sup> the touchstone of consciousness. Where is the controlling will, where is self-consciousness—as a necessary and outstanding element—in love, in self-surrender, in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. G. Collingwood, *op. cit.*, p. 207

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

charity, in truth? And love, art, vocation, value, self-revealing truth—are these not consciousness in the supreme degree?

Voluntary thought can only convert (or ‘amend’) a sensation into a poor generalization, never into that which is universal—or felt as universal—*because* intimate. It can never build up imagination.

Original causality shrinks from every external interfering agent which would defile and destroy its primal and powerfully *potential* character.

And also—there is no settled distinction between articulate and, on the other hand, inexplicit or undeveloped consciousness. Explicit consciousness is always inexplicit and rudimentary as compared with a more explicit and developed consciousness. We cannot on so relative a point of difference build up any predicament whatever.

(3) The same author does not seem to lay stress on, or to consider adequately, the likeliness of a fundamental common nature of sensations. To oppose, in a definite way, the specialized sensuous experiences and a non-specialized imaginative experience<sup>1</sup> (though this opposition, in certain respects, is undoubtedly true and fundamental), may involve a point of view which is wrong, in my opinion, and highly misleading. For it is only according to a superficial view that we believe ourselves to know our senses in their specific organs and functions as the all in all. With truer insight, we feel, and we know, that their specifications, though most important, are comparatively secondary. We should be wrong in assuming that the *positiveness* of a sensation of red—its unity, for instance, and other implied characteristics—has nothing to do with the positiveness of any sensation whatever, of a burn, for instance, or the prick of a needle.

*Seeing*, like expression, like consciousness-taking-shape, is first of all a value of actualization. It is *form*, a primal intrinsically purposive motive-value. The organ of sight is not, ultimately, its cause and does not exhaust its essence.

(4) ‘ Thus imagination resembles feeling in this, that its object is never a plurality of terms with relations between them, but a single indivisible unity: a sheer here and now. The con-

<sup>1</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *op cit*, pp. 147-8

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

ception of past, future, the possible, the hypothetical, are as meaningless for imagination as they are for feeling itself' <sup>1</sup> Supposing, as it is stated, <sup>2</sup> that we have no direct or introspective knowledge about sensation, but only about our more elaborate thought upon it, how shall we be able to assert that the notion, for instance, of the *possible* is entirely extraneous to sensation?

Such a denial—which is also a positive, and daring, affirmation—is grounded on a general view, which seems to me defective. If we only admit that there is in sensation itself something really active, and if we consider the concept of activity in earnest, and do not interpret activity as a process of sheer necessity, a mere relation of conditionality, then—since a positively indeterminate and potential character, as I maintain, is implied in activity—we cannot, inferentially, deny to sensation the capability of the feeling, however vague, of the *possible*, as opposed to the *given* and to the past.

The fact, that the concept of something *active*—not a mockery of activity—has not been duly considered (which fact is the starting-point of many a wild theory and the cause of obvious blindness concerning many a problem), is certainly not without influence on Collingwood's conclusions.

4 I have come to the end of the unpleasant task of finding fault with an able and highly deserving author. Coming back to my own contention, the reader must not feel alarmed if I speak of the *infinite* of a sensation. It is rather the finite than the infinite which is lacking in our poorest sensations—for instance in the sensation of weight.

The destiny of the visible and the audible in art certainly depends, in part, on the fact of their happily joining the finite (seizing, as it were, things respectively in their spatial, or in their temporal, multiplicity and exclusion) and the infinite, that is to say, objective reality and, on the other hand, an essentially indeterminate, powerfully potential one. I need only to look at the topmost part of a tree against a serene sky and I know at once the knot of all causes within the compass of intimate or subjective

<sup>1</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *op cit*, pp 223-4

<sup>2</sup> Cf *Id, id*, p 205.

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

causality—*form*, which is both a value of actualization as far as possible determinate, and a value of active indeterminacy, or potency, or infinity That shining spot of sky, that isle of blue, between the clouds, is immediately and inseparably both a sensation of that blue, and a value of actual infinity—and freedom—without which the same luminiferous rays would not have acquired, through our own and our ancestral experience, this colour for us, but perhaps some other colour, if any colour at all

The words which describe sensations, e.g., 'pure', 'simple'—though the reference to the objective world may be overwhelming—have a subtle and primal source in the very quality of the synthesis, which they reflect It may be objected that these qualities are really the qualities of the developed mental synthesis, *which we know*, and not of the supposed unity of a moment of sentiency as such, and that these qualities are superadded to a rough material which is too far from our consciousness, and in itself too fleeting, for us to seize it and identify ourselves with it I answer, firstly, that we cannot assume that sensations—in so far as they are not previously 'fixed' (as they are said to be) by a superior power of consciousness—are so fleeting, and split up, and pulverized, that we would not be able to know them directly For we must not suppose that the limit to such fragmentariness is primarily dependent on the interference of that superior synthesis It depends, even without that, on the possibility of there being a sensation at all For sensation does not arise, I presume, if it cannot be a psychic reality and possesses a certain unity and inward transparency

Secondly, our every-moment experience—of our consciousness merging into *sentiency* without our noticing any difference except of degree—cannot be neglected It puts the *onus probandi* rather on him who advances such a wild hypothesis, namely, that we must construe sensation as an unknown quantity

The negative and, in a certain sense, agnostic view about sensation seems to me far more misleading and unwarranted than the fact of attributing to sensation qualities which we can express, and conceive, only in terms of our more developed and more articulate and conscious thought The *onus probandi* lies on him who asserts something about something, but this proposi-

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

tion, by itself alone, means very little. For also he who asserts that sensation is of a different nature from that subjectivity of which we may have direct knowledge, asserts something ultimately and tremendously positive. The question is, what is the background of likeliness from which, wittingly or unwittingly, we start, and from which such a proposition acquires its meaning.

5 On the other hand, the characteristic feature of art of which we are speaking—the sensuous material kindled into life, essentially, intrinsically instinct with life *and with intelligence*—must neither be misinterpreted nor over-emphasized.

Sensation is pre-eminently subjected to its conditions, while, in language and in art, spirit vindicates its intrinsically and richly qualified freedom. In this respect, art is at the opposite end of the arch, so to say, as compared with sensation and sense-perception.

And, if we speak of the sensuous material in the present connection, it is not the sensuous material itself which matters, but quality alive and enriched in and through a widespread contact with objective conditions—which may be external to our organism or only internal.<sup>1</sup> In connection especially with physical reality, the ontological meaning of this characteristic feature of artistic or poetical thought is mainly this: art shows that the decried 'point of insertion' between matter and spirit, so wrongly spoken of, considered as a stumbling-block—as a thing to be accounted for by denying it altogether, through some circuitous ways—is the very life and embodiment of the spirit, its richness and its revelation.

Let us also remember that there is an inclination to hold fast to distinctions as dogmas—not religious, but no less mysterious, to cherish them especially in their non-intelligible character, to idolize them with the same, though disguised, obstinacy, with which *facts* are idolized. There are not, however, or there should not be, such forbidden termini in philosophy. We may ask ourselves: Why is this feature characteristic of art?

A multitudinous source of life *and intelligence* is widely kindled

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Intelligence in Expression*, last Part, *Originality of Thought and its Physiological Conditions*

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

in all the qualities of things. The tripartition subject-object-means—which allows only for extrinsic action, and according to which nothing really originates—is either nullified or relegated to a secondary and subsidiary position, and the self-fed flame, perpetually playing on the abyss of nothingness, pervades deeply and widely the world of the artist and absorbs his practical personality. Yet this very self-activity, which forms, *a parte subjecti*, the qualities (and relations) of the objects, is found also, is also operative, in all genuine theory, in all creative work of the scientist, who is absorbed in his subject-matter and made the servant of his thoughts. The richer, unlimited material of expression in art, does not make a substantial point of difference.

Thus we are still faced with characteristic features which are only elements in the definition of art, and the value of which depends on their concurrence with other elements and on their intensity—a matter of degree. What is fundamental in art, and in its definition, is the self-discovering and self-realizing of an original causal principle in its manifold aspects and in its integrity. Art is the perpetual discovery and embodiment of the spirit—the *idea*, of an original causal principle, felt and deepened in its intrinsic or *eternal* character. It is, however, this essential discovery when it is realized in and through a sensuous material which is itself active, itself kindled into a self-substantial quality, itself witnessing the same omni-original cause.

6 *The problem of the 'social function' of art* In the passages of the English poets which I have quoted, there is nothing, so far as I can see, that could be considered and recognized as peculiarly English. (And certainly it is not for this reason that I have meant to select these passages, but for their beauty and meaning.) We may say, no doubt, that in English poetry, and in the passages here quoted, there are subjects which constitute, more frequently than perhaps in all other poetry, the explicit motive-value of the verses—for instance, the deep spontaneity of life and thought—the interest in the 'core', the 'heart', the 'spirit' of life, the very life of life, its innermost soul—which is implicitly conceived as a principle and not as a compound, or the pity for the wordless



## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

animals, and the feeling of a common principle or the foreboding of it in all forms of life. But these are not distinctive features, enabling us to recognize that this or that poet is English, and not of another country. In fact, for instance, I find the most intimate, moving, poetically highest words about a dying skylark, wounded by a hunter, in the strains of a Calabrian poet, Antonino Anile.

To vindicate that which is human and, more than human, essential and universal *because* of its intimate and profoundly original character—this is the moral value of art. To contrast and supersede conventional values, and to overcome all forms of social and political group-solidarity and their blind spirit of exclusion and egoism, and to rebel against the excess of organization which kills the heart of man and life itself, this is the 'social' function of art.

Extreme nationalism is a very powerful thing, and gruesome. It has been checked through the ages by lesser evils—for instance, other forms of group-solidarity, less powerful and less complete, and, in so far, less cruel or more moderate—as when a nobleman of one country felt himself nearer to the nobleman of another country than to his humble neighbour, religious struggles, the fact of nations being divided and allotted according to dynastic interests, anarchy. But are there only evil forces which can practically save real patriotism—real love for one's own country, not nourished with hate and blind pride—from degenerating in extreme nationalism, the enemy of charity and truth? There are certainly also forces of good, but, notwithstanding their highly potential character, and their constancy, they seem not to be effective enough, at a given moment, against the lower nature of man.

One of these positive factors is Christianity, which teaches that, in the humblest conscience, there are moral values that are superior to the egoism of the State. And another, even less dependent on historical contingencies, is art. Hate, cruelty and presumptuous arrogance have never made good poetry—and this is a test of their being or not being rooted in the very depth of the spiritual essence. Freedom must perpetually merge in its *eternity*, love must be felt as a reality *ex principio*, that is to say, in its intrinsic, omni-original character, self-realization must be at

## CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING AESTHETICS

one and the same time a self-transcending principle, or else they have no poetical value. They must be felt as belonging not only to man in general, not only to man essentially or universally, beyond any barrier, but to life itself, even to being itself, and to its destiny, whatever it may be.

7 In almost all my preceding works I have persevered in the study of something really *active*, which intelligibly contains the essentials of our psyche. This conception I have expounded in a more explicit and conclusive way in my last book, on the concept of indeterminacy (cf. especially Part II, Chapter III). In the present work the same conception has been further elaborated and, following on the footsteps of the poets whom I have quoted and in the light of their exalted thought, some new developments have been attained. Thus we have learned the distinction between an actual infinity, and a deeper infinity more directly depending on the primal character of self-activity. We have seen more closely the vital relation between form and infinity. We have apprehended, I dare say in terser terms, the problem of value, while following the endeavour to explain it either immanently or transcendently. We have distinguished spirit from mental activity in general, not pragmatically, nor dogmatically, but as mental activity itself in the full display and depth of its freedom, disclosing in a higher degree its intrinsic nature and the multiplicity and unity of its aspects.

# INDEX

- Active principle, 101, 210-11, 245-7  
 Active (self-active), 2-3, 92-3, 96, 182-4, 288, 313-14, 319, 330 *See* Active principle, Cause, actual, Form and indeterminacy  
 Actualization, 6, 8, 151  
 Affections, 224-5  
 Alliteration and onomatopoeia, 43-5, 118, 149, 261, 285  
 Anile, Antonino, 334  
 Annihilation, 12, 127-9  
 Art, fundamental and specific aspects, 322-5, definition, 209-11, 332-3, value of universality of, 333-5  
 Art, criticism, 127, 181, 322  
 Asceticism, 54, 207  
 Baratonno, Adelchi, 324  
 ✓ Beauty, 3, 83-4, 99, 189, 197-203, 208-9  
 'Being', 69  
 Blake, William, 86-97, 204, 306  
 Blindness, physical, 69, 72, 213-14  
 Bronte, Emily, 245-7  
 Browning, Elizabeth Barrett, 205-17  
 Browning, Robert, 221  
 Bud (the), 18, 20  
 Burden, 253-4  
 Carducci, Giosuè, 229  
 Causality, original, 92-3, 96, 214, 283-5, 294-5, 323 *See* Active, Novelty (creative)  
 Cause, actual, 2, 67, 112-16, 124-5, 133-4, 174, 187, 235, 292-8, 319-21, 323 *See* Causality, original, Active principle  
 Certainty, 61, 323  
 Chambers, E. K., 10  
 Chance, 54, 66, 155, 162, 279  
 Change, 163, 183, 281-2  
 Charity, 13, 29, 30  
 Chicoteau, Marcel, 280  
 Children, 97, 112-16, 223-4, 295  
 Coherence, 201  
 Coleridge, S. T., 122-6, 204  
 Collingwood, R. G., 325-30  
 Collins, William, 83-5, 204  
 Colour, 249  
 Communion, 146, 220  
 Conscience, self-dependent, 37  
 ✓ Consciousness, 58-60  
 Convention, 36-7, 207 *See* Human (the) and the 'social'  
 Cosmological problems, 154, 192-3, 247, 273-4, 301  
 Custom, 45, 55, 112, 158  
 Dante, 7, 167  
 ✓ Death and life relation, 10-13, 46-7, 127-32, 186, 213, 222, 233-4, 269-73, 315 *See* Indeterminacy  
 Death, factual, 23-4, 270  
 De Bosis, Adolfo, 135  
 Deformity, 34  
 Delight, 7, 92-3, 137, 265 *See* Joy, Pleasure  
 Depth, 58-60 *See* Kinships *ex principio*  
 Determination, 98  
 Diotima, 207  
 ✓ Dissatisfaction, 7, 24-5, 58, 80-1, 94, 105, 143, 212, 234, 273, 302, 317, 323  
 Dream, 52, 256  
 Duty, 31, 111  
 Ecstasy, 100  
 Effort, 2, 78, 81-2, 296-7  
 Emergentism, idealistic, 152-3  
 Entelechy, 8  
 Essence, 70, 187-8, 202-3  
 ✓ Eternity, value of, 6-7, 15-17, 178, 181, 189, 196, 199, 323, and everlastingness, 189, factual, 17 *See* Novelty and eternity

# INDEX

- Existential judgment, 42  
 Expectancy, 72  
 Expression, 8, 50, 62, 132, 305, 307  
 Extrinsic processes, 314 *See* Intellect,  
 abstract, Will, abstractly transcen-  
 dent, external, Subject-object means  
 distinction, Intrinsic purposiveness  
 Evil, 33, 93-6, 157-8, 302
- Fancy, 304  
 ✓ Fate, 283, 300-1  
 Form, 8, 133, 262-9, in potency, 18,  
 19-20, 90, 214, 260, 278-9, *see* In-  
 determinacy, in its fullness, 40, 90,  
 exclusive, 35, 94, 157, *see* Pride, *qua*  
 formed, 8, 9, 10, 116, 215  
 ✓ Form and indeterminacy, 10-11, 23-  
 4, 131-3, 183-4, 196, 232-6, 272-3  
 Formative principle (the), 96-7, 174  
 ✓ Formlessness (form-transcendancy),  
 10-11, 23-4, 132-3, 313-14  
 Freedom, 126, 137-9, 238-9, 257,  
 296-8  
 Future, 70, 125, 213
- ✓ Genius, 66, 68, 144  
 Gilbert, Katharine E., 199, 201, 322  
 Gospels (the), 116, 161, 240  
 Grace, 34-5  
 Gray, Thomas, 76-82, 204  
 Growth, 269-70  
 Guyon, Janne Marie, 207
- Height, 135, 169-70, 211, 251, 317  
 Homelessness, 168  
 Hope, 70-1, 125, 287  
 Housman, A. E., 91  
 Hugo, Victor, 229  
 Human (the) and the 'social', 54-7,  
 113-14, 192, 206, 207, 310, 333-5  
 ✓ Hypnotism, 124
- Identity *ex principio*, 62, 162 *See* Kin-  
 ships *ex principio*  
 Idolatry, 54-7  
 ✓ Imagination, 42, 53, 61-2, 88, 102,  
 256, 304-6  
 ✓ Images', 44-5, 53, 91, 119, 151-2,  
 237-8
- ✓ Immanence, 17-18, 37-40, 106, 158-  
 60, 185, 189, 222, 244, 265-7, 323  
*See* Value, immanent and trans-  
 cendental interpretations  
 Immediacy, 62  
 'Implied', 84  
 Indeterminacy, 19, 66, 69-70, 124-5,  
 128, 132-3, 155, 186, 261, 279, 269-  
 82, physical, 155  
 ✓ Individuality, 35-7, 50, 162, 166-7,  
 189-90, 198, 201, 220  
 ✓ Infinite (the) of quality, 89-90, 95,  
 148-9, 193-4, 213-14, 316, of a sen-  
 sation, 330-2 *See* Quality, active,  
 Universals, concrete, Infinity  
 'Infinitives', 19, 26-9, 80, 148-9 *See*  
 Infinite (the) of quality, Simile,  
 Universals, concrete  
 Infinity, 6-7, 103-5, 115, 118, 139-43,  
 164, 226-9, 245-7, and actuality,  
 183-4, 196 *See* Indeterminacy  
 ✓ Inge, W. R., 113, 116  
 Innocence, 321  
 'In-objective', 2, 293  
 ✓ Inspiration, 8-9, 65-8, 76-9, 91-2,  
 108, 135-6, 218-22, 272, 315  
 Instinct, 113  
 ✓ Integrity, spiritual, 212-13, 314,  
 319  
 Intellect, abstract, 57, 88, 95  
 Intelligence, 40  
 ✓ Intelligibility, life's, 87-8, 128-9, 161,  
 162, 257, 296 *See* Universality,  
 Value, immanent and transcen-  
 dental interpretations  
 Intimacy, 118, 198  
 Intrinsic, 6  
 Intrinsic purposiveness, 47-54, 96,  
 158-9, 213, 250-1, 286-9, 314, 315,  
 323 *See* Causality, original  
 Invocation, 109, 135, 149 *See* In-  
 spiration
- ✓ Joy, 5-6, 97, 120, 173-4, 250, 255,  
 263, 265 *See* Delight
- Keats, 182-204, 209, 304  
 Kinships *ex principio*, 2, 31-2, 35-6, 62,  
 77, 278, 292, 305 *See* Cause, actual

# INDEX

- 'Knowledge' intimate and externally constructive, 122-3 *See* Philosophy
- Kuhn, Helmut, 199, 201
- ✓ Language, 20, 150-1, 264
- Leopardi, 140, 180
- Light, 61-5, 132-3, 155-6, 277-8, 293, 331 *See* Sight
- ✓ Lightness, spiritual, 51, 62, 83-5, 253, 314
- Logic, substantial, 305
- Longfellow, 218-31
- ✓ Love, 12-18, 127-30, 152-3, 156-7, 175-6, 217, 294-5 *See* Charity
- ✓ Love's universality, 152-3, 156-7, 294
- Magic, 123-4
- Making, in the, 61, 210-11 *See* Active, Form, in potency
- Many in one (the), 3, 296
- Matter, 154-5, and spirit, 45, 154-5, 207-8, 332
- Mechanism, 98-9, 207
- Medium of expression, 221 *See* Subject-object-means distinction
- ✓ Melancholy, 72, 81, 91, 190
- Mental attitudes, opposite, 54-8, 207, 259
- ✓ Meredith, George, 159, 248-61, 287, 306
- Milton, 61-75, 204
- Moonlight, 25, 118, 142, 170-1, 183
- ✓ Moral values and art, 68, 73-4, 156, 202, 211, 333-5
- Morning, 19, 260
- Murhead, J H, 122, 125
- Murry, John Middleton, 95, 284
- Music, 47
- Myers, Frederick W H, 66
- Mysticism, 86-8
- Nationalism, 334
- ✓ Nature, 28-30, 252-3
- Natura naturans*, 9, 200
- Necessity, 99
- Night, 25, 141-2, 226-7, 274-5
- Noailles, Anne de, 207
- Nothing, 6, 22-3
- 'Novelty (creative)', 8-11, 18-23, 61-2, 136, 162-3, 170-4, 182-3, 222, 252, 260, 278-9, and eternity, 16-17, 184, and universality, 35-6, 136-7, 162 *See* Indeterminacy
- Object (the), 9, 59, 166 *See* Subject-object-means distinction
- Oneness, 127-30
- Onomatopoeia *See* Alliteration
- 'Ontological', 69
- ✓ Originality, thought's, 66-9 *See* Cause, actual
- Pantheism, 252, 285
- Particular (the), 9, 35, 220
- Past (the), 213
- Paul, St, 138
- Passion, 148-9, 308
- Penumbra, 204, 234-5
- Perfection, 8, 158-9
- Perpetual, 118, 148, 173, 255
- Personal identity, 53, 189, 199-201
- Personification, 19, 90
- Petrarch, 48, 73, 267
- ✓ Philosophy, 75, 122-3, 127, 181, 199, 314
- Plastic power, 151, 221, 323
- ✓ Pleasure, 92-3, 288, 319 *See* Delight
- Pity, 30, 157, 242, for animals, 30-1, 121, 152, 157, 192, 236, 333-4 *See* Charity, Love
- Possible (the), 70, 103-4, 329-30
- Potential, 2-3, 23, 69-70, 296
- Premonitory phenomena, 52-3, 300
- Present (the), 78, 90, 159, 185, 196, 222-3
- Pride, 38, 268, 334
- Primal, 169
- Principles, reality of, 6, 138, 149, 162-4, 334 *See* Kinships *ex principio*
- ✓ Prophetic, 52-3, 139, 150-1, 168-9, 171, 174
- Prototypes, 67
- Psyche, 203
- Psychology, 75

# INDEX

- Quality, active, 5-36, 42-5, 132-3,  
its own cause and purpose, 96 *See*  
Infinite (the) of quality, 'Infinitives'
- ✓Reality, value of, 61, in art, 174, 180,  
195, 198-9, 209-10, 223-4, 328
- ✓Real and ideal, 207
- ✓Reason, 102, 243, 256-7, 304  
Reincarnation, 115
- ✓Religious, the, problem, 163-4
- ✓Responsibility, 36, 37  
Rhyme, 196  
Rhythm, 46, 196, 258, 270
- Science, 164, 333 *See* Philosophy
- ✓Self-abasement, 14-15, 290
- ✓Self-activity, 2-3, 154-5, 294 *See*  
Causality, original, Cause, actual
- ✓Self-obliviousness, 270 *See* Spon-  
taneity, Rhythm
- ✓Self-realization, 6  
Self-sacrifice, 13-15, 284  
Self-transcendancy, 10-11, 146-7 *See*  
Causality, original, Form-trans-  
cendancy
- ✓Sensation, 63, 102, 324-32  
Sense, 243, 255-6, 280-1, 298 *See*  
Sensation
- Sentiency in plants, 99, 153-4, 221
- Sex, 206  
Shakespeare, 5-60, 204  
Shame, 147, 215  
Shelley, 7, 127-81, 204  
Sight, 64, 132, 213-14, 329, 330-1  
*See* Light  
Silence, 81, 109-10, 141, 275  
Simile, 149
- ✓Simplicity, 83-5, 132-3, 144-5, 176,  
185, 269-70, 314  
Sleep, 26-7, 141-2, 188  
Smell, 324
- ✓Sorrow, 20-3, 77-8, 104-5, 143-6,  
209-10, 276-7, 284  
Social function of art, 333-5  
Span of consciousness, 90, 196, 263  
*See* Present (the), Form  
Spirit, 96, 133, 204, 335  
Spontaneity, 50, 98-9, 120, 216 *See*  
Intrinsic purposiveness
- Subject-object-means distinction, 9,  
10, 47-51, 110, 256-1, 288-9, 314,  
333 *See* Medium of expression
- Subjectivity, 326-7
- Swinburne, 139, 262-306
- ✓Symbol, 86  
Synthesis, the principle of, 2-3, 99,  
100, 296-7  
System, 201, 206
- Tennyson, 232-44
- Tegnér, Bishop, 219, 220, 224
- Thompson, Francis, 313-21
- Thomson, James, 276
- ✓Thought, 40-1, 57-8, 71-2, 86-7, 91,  
179-80
- Time, 106, 163, 184, 227-9, 260, 299-  
300
- Touch, 62
- Transparency, 2
- Treason, 33
- Trevelyan, G M, 257
- Trevelyan, R C, 140
- Truth, 37, 41-2, 53, 97, 144, 197-9,  
202-3, 205, 208-9, 239-40, 257-8,  
303-6, 323, and beauty, 197-203,  
208-9
- Twilight, 25
- ✓Universality, value of, 6, 62, 115, 136,  
152, 162, 168, 171, 198, 205-6, 211,  
282-3, 333-5, factual, 247, of  
poetry, its universally intelligible  
character, 46-7, 219-20
- Universals, concrete, 26-9, 73-4, 117-  
21, 190-1, 220-1, 237, ethical, 29
- Unpremeditated, 67, 169
- Untaught, 76-7, 115
- Value, 61-2, 110-11, 265, immanen-  
tal and transcendental interpreta-  
tions, 100, 106-10, 158-64, 242-4,  
266-7, and personality, 282-5, and  
consciousness, 313-14, denied,  
abased, 54-7, 143, 207, objectified,  
93, 110, 288, the problem of, 64  
*See* Immanence, Intrinsic purposive-  
ness, Causality, original

## INDEX

Vico, Giambattista, 149

Virginity, 260, 278

Virtual, 69–70

Weight, 22, 330

Wilde, Oscar, 221, 307–12

Will, abstractly transcendent, external,  
54–8, 328

Wisdom, 67

✓Woman, 34–5, 191, 206–7, 310–11

Wordsworth, 98–121, 204, 306